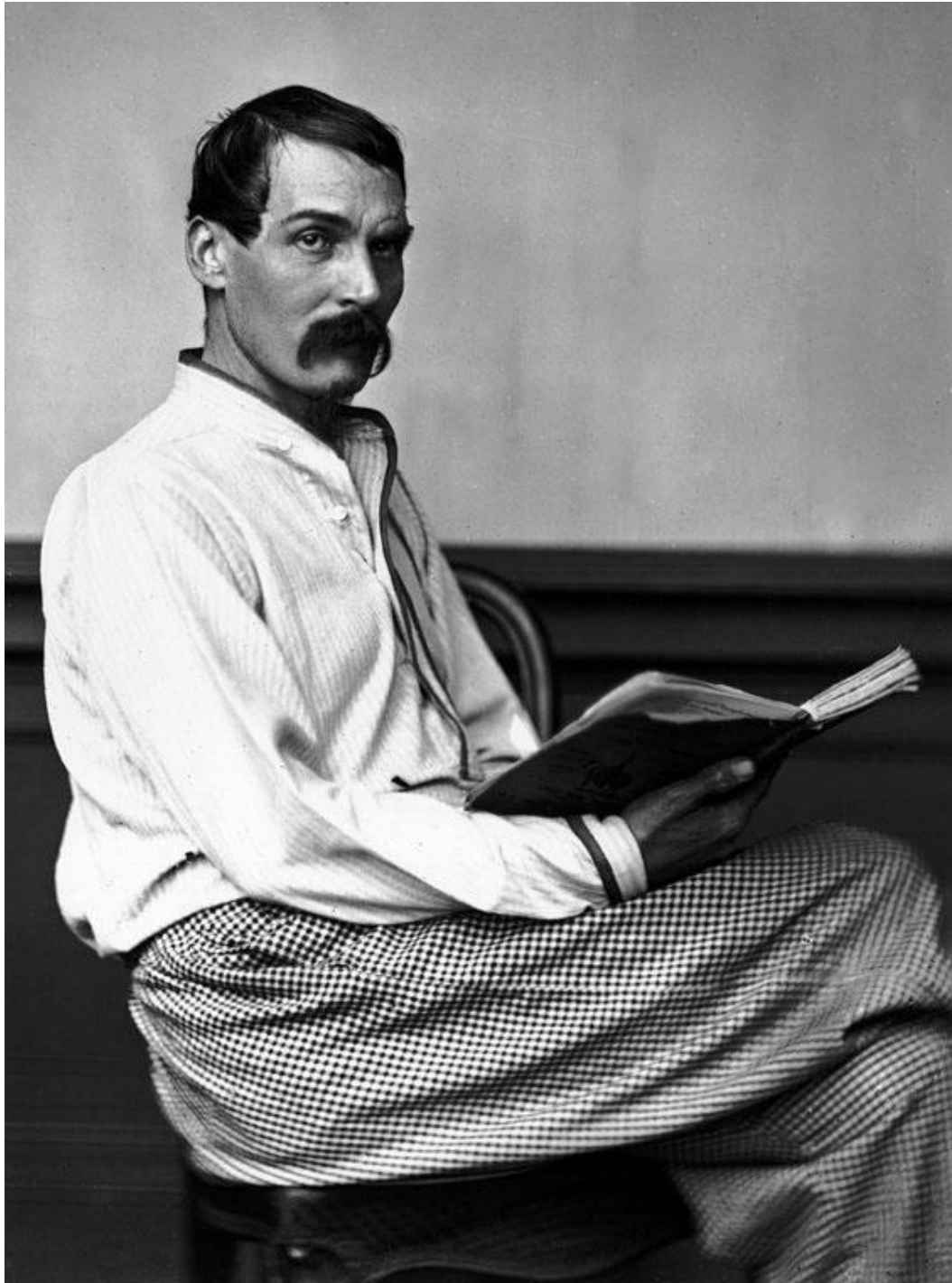


# NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SIR RICHARD BURTON



CAPTAIN SIR RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON IN 1864

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NEW PERSPECTIVES ON  
SIR RICHARD BURTON

ORIENTALISM, THE CANNIBAL CLUB  
AND VICTORIAN IDEAS OF SEX, RACE  
AND GENDER

JOHN WALLEN

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## CONTENTS

Foreword	ix
Preface	xi
Chapter One: Is Burton Still Relevant?	1
Chapter Two: Sufi, Christian or Buddhist? Richard Francis Burton's "Parameters of Belief"	11
Chapter Three: The Cannibal Club and the Origins of 19th Century Racism and Pornography	29
Chapter Four: Burton, Said and Postcolonial Theory: An Unreasonable Discourse	39
Chapter Five: Burton in Makkah and Medina: Sufi Aspirant or Imperialist Spy?	67
Chapter Six: White Skin, Arab Mask: Polygenism and Burton's Sojourn in Harar	97
Chapter Seven: The Gold Mines of Midian and the Land of Midian Revisited: Burton's "Imperial Eyes"	115
Chapter Eight: The "Terminal Essay To Burton's <i>Arabian Nights</i> : 'Tasting The Forbidden Fruit'	131
Chapter Nine: Sexual Anthropology: Burton and Said's "Gendered Axis"	149
Chapter Ten: Burton's Personae: Imperialist Dissimulation or Parody/Hybridity?	161
Bibliography	171
Index	183
About the Author	189





## FOREWORD

Victorian Britain produced many outsized figures, but few as protean and provocative as Richard Francis Burton. A man of great talents and wide interests, he was a soldier, explorer, ethnographer, and consul, a linguist of astonishing ability, a prolific writer and translator, and a controversialist who took delight in shocking and outraging the British public. He left lasting marks on the history of African exploration, the rise of scientific anthropology, the study of human sexuality, the inquiry into comparative religions, and other topics.

Given his wide-ranging accomplishments and influence, it is hardly surprising that so much has been written about Burton. The first biography of him appeared when he was still alive, and many dozens more have been published since his death—including several particularly important ones in recent years. Burton's adventures in Africa, Arabia, and elsewhere have figured prominently in countless accounts of European probes in these regions. He has been the central protagonist in a number of novels and a few films. Historians, literary critics, and other academics have closely scrutinized his views on race, sexuality, and a range of other topics. Yet John Wallen is the first scholar to give full and fair attention to what was arguably the most important influence on Burton's life and thought—the world of Islam.

Burton had his first direct encounter with the Islamic world when he was stationed as a young officer in the British East India Company's Bombay Army in the newly conquered province of Sind (in what is now Pakistan). He was drawn both to the Sufi version of Islam that was prevalent there and to the region's rich cultural heritage, especially its Persian poetry. This experience laid the groundwork for his daring decision to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in the guise of a Pathan Muslim. This dramatic journey—and the compelling book he wrote about it—brought him fame back in Britain. Although his subsequent career would take him to many other parts of the world, he retained an enduring attachment to the Islamic crescent's environment, inhabitants, and faith. He returned to its heartland as British consul in Damascus for a few years and made several brief

trips to North Africa and Arabia. Above all, he remained intellectually and emotionally engaged in the region, as is most memorably evidenced by his powerful piece of poetic philosophy, *The Kasidah*, and his influential sixteen-volume translation of the tales of the Arabian Nights.

The laudable purpose of the present book is to show that Burton was, as Wallen puts it, “largely at one with the East and emotionally and intellectually inspired by it.” In order to advance this claim, Wallen has to challenge and critique the work of the literary scholar Edward Said and his followers, who have dismissed Burton as an especially unsavory agent of British imperialism and enemy of the Islamic world. While Wallen offers abundant evidence that this interpretation is wrongheaded, he is not entirely uncritical in his assessment of Burton. He acknowledges that Burton could give vent to views that we would regard as racist, sexist, and ethnocentric. He was, in other words, a product of his time and culture. What made him remarkable, however, was his ability to transcend many of the prejudices of his age, to regard other cultures with curiosity and respect, and to recognize that no society held a monopoly on truth. And what helped him to reach this level of enlightenment, Wallen makes clear, was his deepening appreciation of the Islamic world, which led him in turn to turn a more skeptical eye toward his own Christian European world’s verities. With our own world so riven by the clash of cultures and faiths, his determination to escape such essentialist attitudes seems especially timely and welcome. Wallen reminds us in this learned book why Burton remains worthy of our attention.

Dane Kennedy

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## PREFACE

Why write a book of essays on Burton? I believe the answer is simple. In many ways Burton is a clear focal point for any discussion on 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalism, Edward Said's influential perspective on those writings, and also on that critical perspective's later flourishing into the academic area of research commonly known today as "postcolonial theory". For good and for bad, Burton is a polarizing force. Said in *Orientalism* spends more time dealing with Burton than any other nineteenth-century "Orientalist" figure, and the very title of Mary Louise Pratt's important book *Imperial Eyes* seems to refer specifically to Burton's first description of Lake Tanganyika during his expedition with Speke to discover the source of the Nile. Other writers, like Rana Kabbani (in her much cited work *Imperialist Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*), describe Burton as being the worst kind of Victorian racist and sexist, epitomizing elitist Victorian ideas and attitudes on race and gender. Conversely, later writers on Victorian history and ideas, such as Dane Kennedy (*The Highly Civilized Man*), have tried to see what was good and positive in Burton's life and career. Specifically, Kennedy has emphasized Burton's importance in the development of a relativistic approach to anthropology and religion that is still beneficial to us today.

These, then, are the reasons why I believe that a close analysis of Richard Francis Burton's life and career might enable us to grapple more effectively with those problems associated with the aftermath of colonialism, be they political, religious or sociological.

John Wallen, 2015



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere gratitude goes out to Dane Kennedy for taking time out from his busy schedule to write a Foreword to this book. I would also like to thank Aymen Elsheikh and Jalal Uddin Khan for their enthusiasm and numerous helpful suggestions. Finally, I must thank Robert West and Ginger McNally of Academica Press for a job well done.









## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **IS BURTON STILL RELEVANT?**

Richard Francis Burton has proved a source of fascination for a large number of writers and researchers. Many biographies have been written about his life, with the latest by Jon Godsall, being the most comprehensive to date (if perhaps inclined to make a little too much of various trivial incidents in Burton's life). To some extent, Burton has lived a double life in literary terms being mostly reviled by postcolonial critics since the time of Said's *Orientalism* while, in contrast, almost becoming the subject of eulogisation for some of his biographers (Edward Rice readily springs to mind in this context). Such paranoia on the part of writers about Burton's life at least indicates a healthy interest in the Victorian period as a whole and the activities of Burton in particular. But what is so unique about these activities and why do they seem to exert such a profound fascination over contemporaries both for good and for bad? In addition, is the present interest in Burton likely to continue for the foreseeable future?

These are difficult questions to answer and, largely, the answers will depend on the continued relevance of the Victorian age to the present and of Burton's activities within that paradigm. Dane Kennedy has accurately pointed out how the Victorians' search for truth is still closely linked to our own and how modern western scientific ideas still use many of the perspectives and ideas first formulated by the Victorians. If this is true—as I think it is—then, by extension, Burton and his explorations and anthropological writings and insights will also continue to be studied in the academy. However, in addition to Dane Kennedy's general point, there is also the question of to what extent the west can better understand the Muslim point-of-view by analyzing the writings of a westerner who, in spite of his profound knowledge of all world religions, openly preferred Islam to any other

faith. Such an unexpected adherence on the part of a highly educated Victorian gentleman, raised in continental Europe, obliquely suggests that Islam must include within itself a deep attraction for those people everywhere with an open mind and a tendency towards theistic belief. In a period of world history when the most important and divisive conflicts have a religious coloring and aspect, a study of Burton will continue to be *de rigueur* for those who wish to try and understand the roots of contemporary world conflict.

Yet another reason why Burton still has relevance today is due to his Sufi like search for ultimate truth and his attempts to synthesize his spiritual needs with his materialistic and scientific outlook. This was only possible due to a very subtle and ambiguous use of various ideas and practical techniques of a spiritual nature that Burton had become acquainted with during his study of the world's major religions. During his time in Sind (modern Pakistan) Burton carefully applied himself to the study of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam—particularly in its Sufi form. From this eclectic mix, emerged a point of view which distinguished between conventional and absolute reality--as all these religions did and do--allowing the researcher and explorer the possibility to use scientific criteria freely and without any reference to spiritual needs while, in spite of this, being finally cognizant that a spiritual possibility still remained through the belief that all scientific truth only touched upon conventional reality while absolute reality lay beyond in another ineffable realm. This search for truth through subtle techniques of perspective and mind still has relevance for those people today who, in ever increasing numbers, attempt to find a way of uniting science with spiritual insights through Sufism, Buddhism, Vedanta and other spiritual traditions.

In this work I do not intend to concern myself with the relevance of the Victorians to the modern day. Dane Kennedy and others have done that very thoroughly and the link is now rather well established. Instead, I will focus on Burton's relevance to the West's present interest in Islam and, later, to spiritual truth in general.

Burton and Islam is a big topic and, in spite of the abundance of relevant texts, a somewhat ambiguous area of research. It is still unknown—and likely to remain unknowable—as to whether Burton made an actual conversion to a Sufi form of

Islam while in Sind. Furthermore, even if he did, we must remain unsure about the extent to which he retained the belief in later life. However, one thing we can be certain about is the profound respect Burton retained for Islam to the end of his days. All of his writings and pronouncements about Islam testify to his high regard for the “saving faith”. For example, in his essay “El-Islam”, started when he was a young man but never finished, there is a strong and undeniable sub-current of praise and reverence for Islam present.

The world is the Muslim’s prison, the tomb his stronghold, and Paradise his journey’s end...To the Muslim, time is but a point in illimitable eternity, life is but a step from the womb to the tomb...He has no great secret to learn. The Valley of Death has no shadow for him; no darkness of uncertainty and doubt horrifies his fancy...As in Christianity as in El Islam, eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath fancy conceived the spiritual joys of those who in mundane life have qualified themselves for heavenly futurity.<sup>1</sup>

There is the perfunctory equating of Islam with Christianity in the above passage but it is obvious to see where Burton’s true sympathies lie.

During his life, Burton was often to compare Christianity with Islam in various ways--and it was invariably Islam that had the better of the confrontation. Burton, for example, was contemptuous of the role of the Christian missionary in West Africa, believing that these missionaries were attempting to thrust a religion that had developed in a particular place and a particular time--for particular people even--on a race that was totally unsuited for its homilies and ‘truths’. Burton’s essential point was relativistic as a look at some of his comments in the first volume of *Two Trips to Gorilla Land* will show:

All races now known to the world have a something which they call right, and a something which they term wrong; the underlying instinctive idea being evidently that something which benefits me is good, and all which harms me is evil. Their good and their evil are not those of more advanced nations; still, the idea is there, and progress or tradition works it out in a thousand different ways.<sup>2</sup>

Burton here spells out his willingness to evaluate Western beliefs according to the same yardstick he used to assess more primitive cultures. Such a procedure, as Kennedy has pointed out, was profoundly contrary to the perspective of Christian

missionaries. In a letter to Lord Russell in 1864, Burton ironically sets down his belief in the futility of trying to change the African to a Christian point-of-view by citing the case of Tom Honesty IV, a chief on the Cameroon River, who “after conversion to Christianity and to the practice of monogamy died of a confirmed syphilis.”<sup>3</sup>

It should be understood that Burton was able to see positive things in the African way of life and spiritual beliefs because he was not heavily invested in the claims of Christianity and was able to view religious activity in the same kind of light as the anthropologist, E.B. Tylor (i.e. as simply a “belief in spiritual beings”).<sup>4</sup> In fact, Burton’s views on African culture and religion are very much dependent on his relativistic habit of mind. On the one hand in his book, *Wit and Wisdom from West Africa*, Burton is able to write:

There is more of equality between the savage and the civilizee--the difference being one of quantity, not of quality--than the latter will admit. For man is everywhere commensurate with man. <sup>5</sup>

Yet, conversely, the same man was accused of “vile national slander” against the people of Sierra Leone by a black lawyer, William Rainy, in his pamphlet *The Censor Censored: or, the Calumnies of Captain Burton (Late Her Majesty’s Consul at Fernando Po) on the Africans of Sierra Leone*.<sup>6</sup> Burton himself remained unrepentant and insisted in a letter to Lord Stanley that the charges had been trumped up because “I do not hold the black to be equal to the white man and...prefer seeing the missionary at home in Spitalfields than abroad in West Africa!”<sup>7</sup>

In order to understand this apparent dichotomy, one needs to understand that Burton did not view all cultures and religions as being equal, but did try to assess them all using the same standards. For Burton, Christianity did not represent the one saving faith in perpetual competition with all others. It was merely one religion amongst many; and, as we are aware, Burton consistently assessed the Islamic religion more highly. For example, the strictures and reservations which Burton applied to Christian missionaries in Africa, did not extend to the natives’ proselytization by Islam. In volume I of *Wanderings in West Africa*, Burton is able

to write: “El Islam has wrought immense good in Africa...it has taught the African to make that first step in moral progress.”<sup>8</sup> At another time, Burton was able to praise Islam as “the Perfect Cure for the disorders which rule the [African] land.”<sup>9</sup>

There are certainly significant clues in Burton’s work that he strongly felt the inadequacies of the Christian faith in relation to what he believed to be the superior Islamic religion. In his essay “El-Islam” which was unpublished during his lifetime, he points out the various shortcomings and shows Islam in the light of being a necessary reformation of a Christianity that had become too full of hatred and self-indulgence:

About the sixth century of its era the Christian world called loudly for reform. When things were at their worst, Muhammed first appeared upon the stage of life.<sup>10</sup>

Burton goes on to dispel what he regards as prejudice and misinformation in the West about Islam and Mohammed, and he finishes his essay with an extraordinary assertion of Islam’s continuing strength:

And should Christianity, as it has often threatened, ever meet the Saving Faith in mortal conflict, and the Cross assail the Crescent, in the latest of crusades, the Muslim scimitar, rusty as it is with the rust of ages, will prove the good metal of which it was in the beginning forged.<sup>11</sup>

In this passage Burton seems to suggest that in the event of some future final battle between Christianity and Islam the latter faith will stand at least an even chance of victory.

Whatever Burton’s feelings about Islam may have been around the time of his pilgrimage, later in life, though still sympathetic to Islam, he acquired a—for his time, unusual—relativism, which insisted that all religions were products of a particular time and place and had no monopoly on absolute truth (a point of view well-expounded in the “Terminal Essay” to the *Arabian Nights*). In 1880, Burton published *The Kasidah*, a poem that he attributed to a fictional mediaeval Persian Sufi poet, Haji Abdu.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the work was an original piece and contained many of Burton’s deepest ideas about religion, faith, life and death:

There is no Good, there is no Bad; these be the whims of mortal will: What works me weal that call I 'good,' what harms and hurts I hold as 'ill': They change with place, they shift with race; and in the veriest span of Time, Each Vice has worn a Virtue's crown; all Good was banned as Sin or Crime.<sup>13</sup>

In *The Kasidah*, Burton presents a view of morality and religion that is a poetic equivalent of the more academic statement in the "Terminal Essay" to the *Arabian Nights*. All religions are relative and have no claim on absolute truth—though their moral and ethical systems may provide human beings with a good example.

A careful consideration of Burton's attitudes to Islam in particular and religion in general, is informative on the process of how all men and women, both the educated and the simple, might find spiritually nourishing insights in Islam which provide some counter-balance to the complexities and uncertainties of the modern world. Moreover, Burton's belief that, for the African continent at least, Islam had a more useful and relevant belief system to offer than Christianity, might help to explain the continued growth of Islam throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries at a time when Christianity has been in decline.

Burton's ambiguity in religious terms also contributes to making him a fascinating and relevant figure for contemporary study. If he had clearly made a conversion to Islam and subsequently seen all history and phenomena from an Islamic perspective, he would probably have less relevance than he currently does have to modern concerns in the western world. It is his very ambivalence, with one foot in the Western camp and the other in the Islamic world, that makes what he has to say so fascinating for contemporaries: especially as this ambiguity and ambivalence is allied to a recognizably post-modernist, poststructuralist type of relativism which still appears "modern". Therefore, the next step is to examine this relativism and ambivalence in more detail and to enquire more deeply into its nature and origins.

Ironically, Burton is often viewed as an atheist or agnostic due to his (for the time) unusual relativism. However Burton's by now well-documented, relativism actually grew out of the particular brand of Ismaili Sufism he studied during his time in Sind and it is extremely unlikely that he didn't believe in some kind of higher, transcendental truth throughout his life. Claiming, as some have done, that Burton undoubtedly made a secret conversion to Islam in its mystical Sufi form is

to be too dogmatic in an area in which we do not have sufficient evidence to be one hundred per cent sure. However, at the very least, Burton's intensive study of hidden and secret forms of religious practice suggests a seeker after "truth".

This conclusion is bolstered by his marriage to a fervent Catholic and his comments about needing a wife who believed in a higher truth. Why would this matter if he had no system of beliefs himself? Wouldn't it, in fact, be a major inconvenience to be joined in marriage with a woman who espoused strong religious beliefs if Burton had himself been an atheist and, generally speaking, anti-religion?

Burton, in fact, had come to believe through long study, that religion was an important part of the human psyche and provided the basis of morality. However, his study of mystical Sufism, Buddhism and the various yogas of the Hindu tradition (particularly Bhakti, Jnana, Raja and Karma) caused him to come to the conclusion that no religion was exclusively "true"—though as an individual, he might have his personal preference. All religions were both true and untrue at the same time. The highest form of truth and insight lay beyond language and thought in an ineffable realm of absolute enlightenment. However, in order to reach this sacred place, humanity needed to climb the steps or rungs on the ladder of conventional religious ideas, which also gave them a strong moral base for their lives. Mystic Sufism, Buddhism and Hinduism all contain the idea that final and highest truth is beyond the capacity of most people to understand and put into words: only through a life-time of secret practice might an individual eventually reach a realization of highest truth—which was beyond language and thought. In the meantime—and always for the majority of people—conventional religion and its stories performed a useful service by keeping adherents on the right track and providing them with a code of morals by which they could live their lives. Bhakti yoga in Hinduism for example, emphasizes the finding of contentment through worship and love. From a Bhakti point of view, all the monotheistic religions would come into this category. For more determined practitioners there were the yogas of knowledge (jnana) and one-pointed meditation (raja). The Hinayana and Mahayana split in Buddhism between sutra and tantra contains the same belief, while mystical forms of Sufism also believe in a higher state of enlightenment

beyond the forms and words of conventional worship.

I believe it was this higher, ineffable state of enlightened truth that Burton believed in rather than any particular religion—though he had his own natural preference for Sufism as a means of arriving at a profound and ineffable level of realization. This commitment is made apparent in his long poem *The Kasidah* where Burton, writing under the guise of a Muslim wise man, expresses many of his own deepest beliefs.

Believe in all things; none believe; judge not nor warp by “Facts” the thought;

See clear, hear clear, tho life may seem Maya and Mirage, Dream and Nought.

This “I” may find a future life, a nobler copy of our own,  
Where every riddle shall be ree’d; where every knowledge shall be known.

Where ‘twill be man’s to see the whole of what on earth he sees in part;  
Where change shall ne’er surcharge the thought; nor hope deferred shall hurt the heart.<sup>14</sup>

Burton here expresses his own impotence to put into words the things that are most important. Like Wittgenstein in *Tractatus*, he must simply pass over them in silence—simply because they *are* ineffable.

In conclusion, I would contend that Burton’s contemporary relevance lies in his tolerance for all religious faiths (sending a powerful message of brotherhood and peaceful cohabitation in the world) combined with his search for ultimate, ineffable, truths relevant to masses of people everywhere. At a time when more and more individuals look to find and benefit from the most essential pith instructions of Sufism, Buddhism and the various meditational techniques of India, Burton’s will continue to be an inspiring example for some people to follow.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup> Sir Richard F. Burton, *El Islam* (London: Hutchinson, 1898).



- <sup>2.</sup> *Two Trips to Gorilla Land and the Cataracts of the Congo*\_vol. I, 183-184.
- <sup>3.</sup> Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, (Harvard University Press, 2005), 47.
- <sup>4.</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor. *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom*\_. Volumes 1 & 2. London: John Murray, 1872.
- <sup>5.</sup> Richard F. Burton, *Wit and Wisdom from West Africa*, (London: Tinsley Bros., 1865) xii, xxiv-xv, xxvii-xxviii.
- <sup>6.</sup> William Rainy, *The Censor Censored: or, the Calumnies of Captain Burton (Late Her Majesty's Consul at Fernando Po) on the Africans of Sierra Leone* (London: printed for the author, 1865). Rainy was a West Indian from Dominica who was recruited for government service in Sierra Leone.
- <sup>7.</sup> Burton to Lord Stanley, June 5, 1867, FO/97438/181-187.
- <sup>8.</sup> Richard F. Burton, *Wanderings in West Africa* 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Bros., 1863) vol. I, 161.
- <sup>9.</sup> Richard F. Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome* 2 vols. (London: Tinsley Bros., 1864) vol. I, 408.
- <sup>10.</sup> *The Jew, The Gypsy, and El Islam*, 321.
- <sup>11.</sup> *Ibid.* 346.
- <sup>12.</sup> "F.B." (Richard F. Burton), *The Kasidah* (privately printed, 1880).
- <sup>13.</sup> *The Kasidah*, 9-10.
- <sup>14.</sup> *Ibid.* 21.



## CHAPTER TWO

### SUFI, CHRISTIAN OR BUDDHIST? RICHARD FRANCIS BURTON'S "PARAMETERS OF BELIEF"

#### 1. Introduction

The inner workings of Victorian explorer Richard Burton's mind, have profoundly interested many of his biographers and critics. Perhaps this is because the man's life seems contradictory in so many ways. Most famous for his love of Islam and his pilgrimage to Medina and Mecca, he was also a self-confessed racist who wasn't averse to using pseudo sciences like phrenology and craniometry to propagate his rather unsavory elitist views; an outspoken critic of Christianity, Burton was yet married to a fervent Catholic from the upper classes for nearly thirty years. Burton was also an iconoclast who made it his business to undermine the intellectual foundations of the Victorians' belief in their own superiority over other races of men. On the other hand, Burton spent nearly all of his adult life serving British imperialism as either soldier or diplomat. No wonder so many people have tried to understand what made Burton tick—though usually without much success. The interpretations have been many and diverse. For Thomas Wright, his first biographer (after Isabel's unreliable eulogization<sup>1</sup>), he was a fraud who didn't deserve the title of translator, having copied his translation of the *Arabian Nights* wholesale from his long suffering friend, Thomas Paine<sup>2</sup>. For his niece, Georgiana Stisted, he was a free thinker who had been outrageously misinterpreted by his catholic wife, Isabel<sup>3</sup> (who, against all logic, insisted on believing that her husband had been "half catholic" as well as "half sufi"). More recently, the biographers Fawn Brodie and Edward Rice have regarded Burton as a closet gay<sup>4</sup> and life-long adherent of a mystical form of Islam respectively<sup>5</sup>. Historian, Dane Kennedy has labeled Burton a "relativist"<sup>6</sup> while feminist critics such as Rana Kabbani<sup>7</sup> and Mary Louise Pratt<sup>8</sup> have deplored the sexist, paternalist and imperialist themes in the writer's work. It is hardly surprising in the light of

such profoundly disorienting contradictions, that many of those who have written about Burton have also determined to try and get to the bottom of their man's psyche in order to find some existential explanation for such glaring anomalies, believing that this would, somehow, make the numerous contradictions disappear in a proverbial puff of smoke.

Perhaps Edward Rice has been most guilty of creating a Burton that was to the liking of his own imagination, but had little to do with the actual man. Although Rice can be illuminating on the young Burton in Sind, he too frequently jumps to the conclusion he wants to arrive at--such as his apparent belief in a sexually rampant Burton, constantly "bedding" native women during his expedition with Speke to the lakes of central Africa.<sup>9</sup> More importantly, Rice is dogmatic about Burton's early "conversion" to Islam, believing that circumstantial evidence--which has been examined again and again by many diverse scholars and biographers--incontrovertibly proves that Burton became a Muslim during his time in Sind.<sup>10</sup> Rice's belief in this regard is a mere leap of faith: although Burton's high regard for Islam--especially during the first half of his life--has been well chronicled, there is nothing to prove that he ever actually became a Muslim. Indeed, as Dane Kennedy points out, if conversion to Islam means adhering to the five pillars, such as regular prayer and always fasting during Ramadan, then Burton quite obviously was not a Muslim.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Burton was a heavy drinker all his life and this taken together with his well-documented fascination with sex and pornography, would seem to suggest that he felt little need to place any religious restrictions on his own personal habits and predilections. In other words, if Burton was indeed a Muslim, as Rice would have us believe, then he was most certainly a very bad one.

Perhaps the most influential misinterpretation of Burton and his ideas in recent times has come from the pen of Edward Said in his famous book *Orientalism*.<sup>12</sup> In this seminal work of criticism, Said puts forward a very particular view of Burton which has become influential in critical circles without--in my opinion--having much real justification. Said portrays Burton as the master of society's codes and rules; as someone who could easily assimilate the traditions and values of a culture (and emulate them) without ever feeling any real sense of connection or alliance

with the culture involved. This approach enables Said to account for Burton's well-known love and deep understanding of Islam without having to place him outside the theory of "Orientalism" that he (Said) develops during the course of his influential book. Burton is presented as a genuine lover of knowledge and as a great scholar who never at any time had any doubts about where his own essential loyalties lay. His unique skills, subtle and mostly hidden, were always at the service of the imperial center and, it is implied, those religious and cultural values that it was inspired by.<sup>13</sup>

This has proved to be a very influential view of Burton--as it is one which is supportive of the whole postcolonial set of ideas—and many scholars subsequent to Said such as Rana Kabbani and Mary Louis Pratt have taken a similar line. Unfortunately, it is also a point-of-view that is wrong. Burton was not at all someone who easily understood the rules and codes of other societies: a point that can be supported by reference to his unhappiness at Oxford due to the continental manners (acquired during his peripatetic upbringing abroad) which he found impossible to change or adapt once he arrived in England<sup>14</sup> and, also, by his later dismissal from the consul's position at Damascus as a result of boorish hot-headedness and an inability to understand the local rivalries and enmities of the region<sup>15</sup> In fact, Burton's love of Islam was genuine and not at all part of some imperial sham for the benefit of the British empire and for his own advancement. Certainly, he did not possess the subtle chameleon-like adaptability that Said credits him with in *Orientalism* (for his own purposes, it must be said). Said's determination to praise Burton for qualities he clearly never possessed, casts genuine doubt on his detailed knowledge of Burton and his achievements. Very likely, for Said, Burton was no other than one more awkward example that had to be fitted, somehow or other, into the confines of his theory on Orientalism.

Subsequent postcolonial scholars and critics of colonialism in general, have been less kind even than Said in their writings on Burton. Rana Kabbani in her book *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* embarks on a startling would-be demolition of Burton, motivated by a clear and strong desire to totally destroy his reputation in all areas of scholarly endeavor. According to Kabbani, Burton is a sadist and misogynist who so loved the East and its ways because he found in

them a confirmation of his own perverted attitudes to sex and women. Kabbani seems to take real pleasure in denouncing Burton and even seems to hold him accountable for the high number of British clitoridictimies that took place during the Victorian age.<sup>16</sup> Her essential view about Burton appears to be that his racism, sexism and imperialism can stand as a mirror representation of the racism, sexism and imperialism of the Victorian period as a whole: surely, a grossly unfair conclusion? Why hold Burton personally responsible for all the shortcomings of the age? It would be fairer to reverse the equation and view Burton's ideas in these matters as, to a large extent, belonging to the general cultural outlook of the Victorian period itself.

Mary Louise Pratt's book *Imperial Eyes Travel Writing and Transculturation* has become almost a staple textbook of post-colonialism and, as with Said, she seems to give a certain pre-eminence to the travels of Burton. It would appear that the very title of the book itself is a reference to Pratt's rather minute examination of Burton's description of his first sight of Lake Tanganyika when, according to Pratt, the lake is first aestheticized prior to being appropriated for the colonial power by Burton's "imperial eyes".<sup>17</sup> Perhaps it would be at least equally pertinent to observe how Pratt herself constructs the scene from her own epistemological preconceptions, animating it with a kind of mystical immanence which perhaps has little real tangibility beyond her own postcolonial concerns. Certainly, it's perfectly possible to read Burton's account as a simple text of discovery: the explorer's moment of joyous realization as the desired goal is finally reached after many months of uncertainty, hardship, sickness, and personal deprivation.

I have already dealt with some of the Burton biographers such as Burton and Edward Rice, but Fawn Brodie, Mary Lovell<sup>18</sup> and Jon R. Godsall<sup>19</sup> are others who have constructed "Burtons" (either to a greater or a lesser extent) in their own images. Brodie wrote in the sixties when Freudian psychoanalysis was strongly in vogue and she is determined, in her biography, to trace almost all of the important elements in Burton's personality back to his childhood and early sexual urges. Brodie concludes that Burton was probably homosexual.<sup>20</sup> Mary Lovell's biography, *A Rage to Live*, is far more balanced than Brodie's, but in its determination to view the union of Burton and Isabel as an equal partnership it

overemphasizes Isabel's intellectual contribution to Burton's fame. Perhaps this is due to Lovell's deeply felt feminist perspective. Godsall's is the most recent of the biographies and it is mostly accurate and comprehensive. However, Godsall's continuous concern to point out Burton's many lies and deceits (both major and minor) eventually begins to create an unbalanced picture of a Victorian charlatan who was undeserving of the acclaim he received. I am sure this was not Godsall's intent but, in practice, this is sometimes the actual result.

Dane Kennedy's *Highly Civilized Man* is perhaps the most interesting book written about Burton in recent times. Kennedy uses Burton as a fulcrum for an understanding of the Victorian age as a whole, coming to the conclusion that Burton was a relativist: not sincerely believing in any religion as "true", while methodologically being most interested in the accumulation of data with the purpose of constructing reasonable hypotheses in the scientific manner. Kennedy makes a strong case for Burton's relativism, and there is clearly a lot of truth in the picture of Burton that he creates. However, Kennedy too is sometimes guilty, like the others, of making a Burton in his own image (in spite of his ability to clearly see both Burton's racism and anti-semitism). Kennedy's Burton has little of the irrational about him but, it is my belief, irrationalism and an often pig-headed contradictoriness played a large and important part in Burton's personal make up.

From this brief survey of writers on Burton it can be seen that there exists a wide discrepancy of views. Frequently, individual writers have created the Burton they wanted by emphasizing certain points while minimizing the importance of others. As a consequence of this, and in a (possibly hubristic) attempt to get closer to what Burton really thought, I next intend to look in a detailed way at Burton's two long imaginative poems published 15 years apart from each other: *Stone Talk* in 1865<sup>21</sup> and *The Kasidah* in 1880.<sup>22</sup> I should emphasize from the beginning that there is a wide discrepancy in quality and intent between these pieces: *Stone Talk* often hardly rises above the level of doggerel, while *The Kasidah* is a fine attempt in the Eastern elegiac tradition which Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* had made so popular. If *The Kasidah* finally fails in its attempt to create a lasting poetic contribution to the ideals of pantheistic pessimism, it is mostly due to the repetitive nature of the material. After a few basic concepts have been laid out, *The Kasidah*

is mostly concerned with finding the perfect couplet to express the thought. In consequence, there is a lot of repetition as Burton struggles to say again what he's already said before in a way that can hardly be bettered. However, the poetical merit of these works will not be my concern in the present essay. I intend to look at them as potential sources of information concerning Burton's most deeply held ideas and attitudes. Why should we expect to find out anything about such things in these two works of fictional narrative? Well, first of all, both were written under pseudonyms and, therefore, give a certain amount of license for the expression of views which may be different or unusual; that Burton possessed some odd attitudes for his time, is supported by the wide range of antagonistic views he expressed over his long working life. We might reasonably surmise that while some of his contentious views—his polygenism and his anti-semitism for example—were explicated in his normal writings, other more deeply personal beliefs may have been more fully expressed in his two long poetical works.

*Stone Talk* and *The Kasidah* are two very different works both in quality and intent. *Stone Talk* is a humorous piece full of sardonic irony while *The Kasidah* is a genuine attempt at proving Burton's poetic ability through a moving invocation of the Hadji's pantheistic views. Nevertheless, in both I believe Burton expresses many of his own most deeply held ideas. The rather ridiculous Brahmin in *Stone Talk* is given free rein to express the most extreme beliefs and it is at least interesting that some of them—such as the idea that the planet would be better off without humanity on it—had even occurred to Burton. We certainly will not be able to take all ideas expressed in *Stone Talk* as Burton's own because the aim is essentially to lampoon, shock and amuse. In spite of this, it is still interesting to follow Burton's sometimes absurd lines of reasoning and attempt to isolate those ideas which may have been his own. In contrast to *Stone Talk*, *The Kasidah* is a serious and high-minded poem. Burton's philosophical Hadji is clearly very similar to himself and, as Burton struggles to give poetic longevity to his creation, it will not be surprising if the level of personal sincerity is high.

First, I intend to look in some detail at *Stone Talk* and see what can be gleaned from it of a personal nature. After that, I will examine the more biographically fertile ground of *The Kasidah*.



## 2. *Stone Talk*

The ridiculous premise of *Stone Talk* is that a drunken Dr. Polygott, Ph.D is engaged in discourse by a paving stone that is, in fact, the reincarnated spirit of a Hindu Brahmin. As Gavan Leroux points out in his introduction to the 2007 Burtoniana edition, “Stone Talk is best read as obfuscated autobiography, for its reflections of Burton’s highly idiosyncratic concerns; it is interesting now for its insights into Burton himself.”<sup>23</sup> It is in this latter spirit that I will examine the poem.

As an initial point of some importance, it can be stated that during the stone’s early narrative of its reincarnated history down the millennia, a strongly scientific and Darwinian perspective is emphasized:

How from the Monad’s starting point,  
Began a chain whose latest joint  
Ever put forth another link,  
Till matter learned to speak and think;  
How ‘scaped from the primeval sea,  
Grass became herb, herb shrub, shrub tree;  
How fishes crawled to birds, and these  
To beasts (like you) by slow degrees.<sup>24</sup>

At the time of *Stone Talk* Darwin’s *Origin of Species* was little more than five years old and the publication of *The Descent of Man* lay six years in the future. Nevertheless, in 1865 Burton clearly embraced the idea of evolution. This is reinforced a little further on by a reference to apes as the ancestors of man:

Ah, what a sight were you when first  
By freak of matter Adam burst  
Through Simian womb! Scant then man’s prate  
Of human nature’s high estate.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, Burton seems strongly aware that men in general and Victorian England in particular (given its role as colonial master) need to mythologize and heroicise their less than glamorous past.

Now you have tales enough to hide  
Your origins and salve your pride.<sup>26</sup>

Burton is also keenly aware of how language is finally the ultimate civilizing force: the crucial source of all future elaboration.

Pali or Hebrew (each tribe tries  
To prove its own the primal speech)<sup>27</sup>

Hebrew is denigrated as “a pauper dialect”--perhaps pointing to a latent anti-semitism that was to be most clearly manifested in the aftermath of Burton’s disastrous consulship in Damascus.

From line 644 on, there begins a long meditation by the Brahminic stone on how much better off the earth would be if it were once and for all rid of man who has deprived the animals of their habitats.

Now, man! Suppose the globe once more  
Had some convulsion as of yore---  
Enough to exterminate the pest  
Of nature and to spare the rest---

What a glad scene my mental eye  
Through the dark future doth espy!<sup>28</sup>

It is not easy—especially for Victorian imperialists—to imagine a world lacking the presence of the human species. European Cartesianism even doubted if an external world existed at all if there wasn’t a human mind to perceive it! Burton shows a pessimistic and realist side of his personality in considering the possibility of a world without humanity (and by regarding such a state of affairs as being desirable).

In the best and most sustained sequence of poetic language in the poem, Burton states his idea that there is nothing particularly factual about facts:

Facts are chameleons, whose tint  
Varies with every accident:  
Each, prism-like, hath three obvious sides,  
And facets ten or more besides.  
Events are like the sunny light  
On mirrors falling clear and bright  
Through windows of a varied hue,  
Now yellow seen, now red, now blue.<sup>29</sup>

This touches on Burton's relativism and belief that groups of men and women will always twist "facts" in the way that is most suitable to them. Perhaps an even more extreme philosophical point is present here: there is no such thing as facts! Facts are merely a conglomeration of atoms or particles that give the illusion of conveying truth: they have come together gratuitously for an instant before changing into something else. Humans, however, insist on ossifying these wandering particles, accrediting meaning to them, and even believing in their universal applicability.

It is natural from this that Burton should put forward an ambiguous attitude towards "truth" itself:

"Truth, sir's a lady strangely made,  
As centaur, Pan, merman or maid;  
In general, a Protean dame  
Never for two brief hours the same."<sup>30</sup>

Burton here states his belief that men can never agree about the nature of "truth" because it will always change--and continue to change---according to what each man's own self-interest might be:

Why need I prove that each man's thought  
Is each man's fact, to others nought?  
Yet, mark me, no one dubitates  
Himself, or owns he errs. He rates  
Against his fellows' folly, they  
At his; and both are right I say."<sup>31</sup>

This is surely very interesting. In what sense could people with completely different answers to the same question both be right? Presumably, only in a relativistic way. Both beliefs may be considered "correct" if their function is not absolute truth, but the welfare of the person or persons propagating the belief. This interpretation would certainly be in line with Burton's belief, frequently expressed, that cultures and religions develop idiosyncratically with the purpose of instilling strength and longevity into particular groups of people.

The stone is also highly critical of England's colonial role, seeing its empire as

nothing other than “plunder on the largest scale”.

See India, once so happy, now  
 In scale of nations sunk so low---  
 That lovely land to which were given  
 The choicest blessings under heaven,  
 Till ravening Saxon, like simoom,  
 With fire and sword brought death and doom.<sup>32</sup>

It is profoundly thought provoking that Burton, frequently interpreted as an arch imperialist and orientalist, is able here to clearly appreciate the tenuous nature of England’s claim to empire. It would seem that Burton’s relativism made it impossible for him to hide from himself the opportunistic nature of England’s claim on the rest of the world. England had conquered an empire because it could and, while Burton as an individual Englishman might do all he could to uphold and even expand that empire, philosophically he was unable to deceive himself about the “civilizing” benefits of that control for the native inhabitants.

There are also references to Burton’s possible Sufism in the poem:

What is a soul but life derived  
 From life’s Eternal Fount deprived  
 Of power to gain its upward source  
 Or leave unbid the prison-corse?<sup>33</sup>

Burton had studied Sufism under the Isma’ilis in Sind and it was their profound belief that the soul was like a bird constantly in search of the higher spiritual home from which it had come. Importantly for Burton’s relativism, Sufic spiritual insights lay beyond conventional notions of truth and falsehood, good and bad—which were perceived as being infinitely malleable. In other words, it is at least possible that Burton’s Sufism might actually have been a primary source for his relativism. At the most profound level, perhaps he just didn’t invest too much of his spiritual identity into conventional ideas about morality and “truth”.

*Stone Talk* also speaks at length about the ills of capitalism, the deviousness and cupidity of English politics and politicians; the immorality of slavery and the foolishness of fashion. Overall, one gets the impression of a Richard Burton enjoying himself and paying back old scores, safe and secure, far from home (the

poem was probably composed in West Africa where Burton was working at the time of the poem's composition). However, as can be seen from the present examination, although the essential aim of *Stone Talk* may have been comic, there is a fair chance that during the course of composing more than 3000 lines, some of Burton's deepest beliefs may have been revealed.

As stated at the beginning, we must be careful in accrediting to Burton the ideas and statements of fictional characters. However, given the 'mouthpiece' nature of Burton's reanimated stone, it would not be surprising if during the course of such a long diatribe, many of Burton's own beliefs were revealed. In particular, a profound relativism runs through the poem—which is also typical of Burton's own intellectual life. A deep pessimism is also present which, in spite of Burton's adherence to the English ruling class, makes itself most felt in the insistence on the opportunism and rapacity of colonial dominance and the belief that nations conquer others only for their own gain and profit. Finally, there is just a hint that mystical Sufism might provide spiritual insights that lie beyond the contrasting moralities and practical beliefs of conflicting men and societies.

Let us now continue our quest to find at least some few elements of Burton's highly individual belief system by examining *The Kasidah* in some detail.

### **3. *The Kasidah***

The *Kasidah* provides a more interesting source for Burton's ideas than *Stone Talk*. In the first place, it lacks the latter's comical and fantastic intent. Secondly, Burton is writing under the pseudonym of a Muslim wise man, Haji Abdu Al Yazdi: and it is well known and generally accepted by scholars that Burton possessed a profound sympathy for Islam and its beliefs. Consequently, this should be a sober-minded Burton providing the reader with insights into what he liked and admired most about this foreign faith. Finally, in *The Kasidah* Burton was attempting to write real poetry; something that certainly wasn't true of the rhyming doggerel of *Stone Talk*. Given the juxtaposition then of Muslim beliefs with high poetic intent we might reasonably expect to find more of the true Burton in *The Kasidah* than in *Stone Talk*.

After an atmospheric opening and many couplets in the pantheistic style of Omar Khayyam, Burton begins to touch on his own relativism and belief that the diverse societies of men in the world make God in their own image and out of their own self-love.

Man worships self; his God is Man; the struggling of the mortal mind  
To form its model as 'Twould be, the perfect of itself to find.<sup>34</sup>

A little later, Burton makes his relativistic take on morality even clearer:

There is no Good, there is no Bad; these be the whims of mortal will.  
What works me weal that call I 'good', what harms and hurts I hold as "ill".<sup>35</sup>

This is very much in tune with what we know of Burton the pioneering anthropologist, interested in every belief system he encountered and eager to show that none of them had any absolute claim on truth.

Burton goes on to develop his point (under the guise of the learned Haji) that all morality is relative and changes both from society to society and even within the same society itself.

They change with place, they shift with race; and in the veriest span of Time,  
Each Vice has worn a Virtue's crown; all Good was banned as Sin or Crime.<sup>36</sup>

This must have been a disturbing thought indeed for a conservative and expansionist English imperialist society which wished to impose its own vision of the world on its subject races.

Burton makes it clear that conscience itself, the quality that so many religious thinkers of the time believed separated us from the animals, was something that developed only after evolution and language had separated man, in his own estimation, from the natural kingdom.

The moral sense, your Zahid-phrase, is but the gift of latest years;  
Conscience was born when man had shed his fur, his tail, his pointed ears.<sup>37</sup>

Such a bald statement of belief in conscience as a corollary of language, evolution, and social activity must inevitably have outraged more conventional thinkers of the time. According to “Haji Burton”, Soul, like Conscience, has been created in the minds of men only after his separation from the rest of the animal kingdom:

Where was his Soul the savage beast which in primeval forests strayed?  
What shape had it, what dwelling place, what part in nature’s plan it played?  
This Soul to ree a riddle made; who wants the vain duality?  
Is not myself enough for me? What need of “I” within an “I”?  
Words words that gender things! The soul is a newcomer on the scene;  
Sufficeth not the breath of Life to work the matter-born machine?<sup>38</sup>

Burton next goes on to make the point that ideas about absolute truth, morality and eternal souls are merely the result of a highly sophisticated society that has developed far beyond its original lowly beginnings.

Life is a ladder infinite-stepped, that hides its rungs from human eyes;  
Planted its foot in chaos gloom, its head soars high above the skies.<sup>39</sup>

We may pride ourselves on the fact that we, unlike the animals, are creatures of reason and intellect but, according to Burton, this is only to mask the knowledge of where our true beginnings lie.

Reason and Instinct! How we love to play with words that please our pride;  
Our noble race’s mean descent by false forged titles seek to hide!<sup>40</sup>

Just as we are really a part of the animal kingdom and all our beliefs concerning our special status are false, so human conceptions of heaven and hell are erroneous and based on our narcissistic need to view ourselves as special.

There is no Heaven, there is no Hell; these be the dreams of baby minds;  
Tools of the wily fetisheer; to ‘fright the fools his cunning blinds.<sup>41</sup>

Belief in a particular faith is a mere accident of birth: we follow the belief system of the land we are born into:

Again: in Hind, Chin, Franguestan that accident of birth befell.  
Without our choice, our will, our voice: Faith is an accident as well.<sup>42</sup>

But if all civilized concepts of morality, heaven and hell, good and evil are false, what can make life worthwhile? According to Burton (in the guise of Haji Abdu) to live a genuine life a man must be honest, face these difficult truths, and search to advance his own self-worth and knowledge.

With ignorance wage eternal war, to know thyself forever strain  
Thine ignorance of thine ignorance is thy fiercest foe, thy deadliest bane;  
That blunts thy sense, and dulls thy taste; that deafs thine ears, and blinds  
thine eyes;  
Creates the thing that never was, the Thing that ever is defies.<sup>43</sup>

In this conception of knowledge and self-growth as the most important aims of life, Burton is perhaps not too far away from his younger contemporary, Nietzsche, who while declaring that God was dead advocated the birth of a new Superman.

To seek the true, to glad the heart, such is of life the HIGHER LAW,  
Whose difference is the man's degree, the man of gold, the man of straw.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, there is another trend present in Burton's thought; one that was inspired, at least to some extent, by his early study of Sufism in Sind. What about the possibility that life itself is no more than an illusion, the Maya spoken of by the Indian Hindu sages? In this case, while we should play the game according to the rules of the illusion, good, bad, heaven, hell, even life itself, are all just intrinsically unreal things and, as with the Buddhists and Sufis, the real aim is to recognize its insubstantial nature and move beyond it into the ineffable light of final enlightenment and truth.

Believe in all things; none believe; judge not nor warp by "Facts" the thought;  
See clear, hear clear, tho life may seem Maya and Mirage, Dream and Nought.

This "I" may find a future life, a nobler copy of our own,  
Where every riddle shall be ree'd; where every knowledge shall be known.



Where 'twill be man's to see the whole of what on earth he sees in part;  
Where change shall ne'er surcharge the thought; nor hope deferred shall hurt  
the heart.<sup>45</sup>

If this duality in Burton was truly present in his psyche (as I believe it was), we might be more accurate to describe the subject of this book as “half Sufi and half relativist” than—as in Isabel Burton’s oft quoted words—“half Sufi and half Catholic.”

#### 4. Summary

In summary, it may be said that through the study of these two texts, we have been able to, arguably, obtain some deeper insights into the psyche of Richard Francis Burton. This psyche was profoundly skeptical of conventional ideas on morality, difference, religion, sexuality and power. For these reasons, in spite of his own well recorded activities to further the spread of the British Empire during Victoria’s reign, Burton might well, in retrospect, be considered as a predominantly progressive force who helped make manifest the essential equality between the British “masters” and the colonial peoples they ruled over.

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## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE CANNIBAL CLUB AND THE ORIGINS OF 19TH CENTURY RACISM AND PORNOGRAPHY**

This chapter will examine the activities of the notorious mid-Victorian men's club known as the "Cannibal Club" with the intention of relating its activities to the specific forms of racism and sexism that grew out of the intellectual ferment of the time. It was during this critical period that "the scientific method" was established and throughout this crucial time science, ethnography and anthropology were often unable to move beyond the imperial and colonial attitudes of the men who as politicians, bureaucrats, scientists and explorers populated the British Empire. The effect of this was often to prioritize views of "the other" that emphasized his/her difference and, usually, inferiority. There was real tension in Victorian Britain between the establishment of a democratic scientific methodology for the examination and explanation of phenomena and the elitist attitudes that underpinned Anglo-Saxon dominance of the colonial space. This intrinsic inner tension was present even in the attitudes of those men and women who helped to shape the new scientific and, largely, relativist methodology that was gradually emerging in the last fifty years of Victoria's rule.

The importance of the "Cannibal Club" is as a fulcrum for the often confused and confusing attitudes of the time. Men like James Hunt, Richard Burton, Richard Monckton Milnes and Algernon Swinburne, leading lights of the "Cannibal Club", were men who, on the one hand, were representative of the new relativism which tended to pour scorn on the idea of Christianity as the one universal religion which all colonial people should convert to after assimilation into the British Empire; on the other, these men actively acted out their innate sense of racial superiority over colonial people in the private space of the "Cannibal Club". Such well-documented elitist attitudes often had an effect on the particular strands of new thought which prominent Victorians propagated. For example, Burton and Hunt strongly believed

in a multiple genesis of the human species because this suited their racist agenda. In addition, most of the cannibals were enthusiastic hedonists, dedicated to the perusal and collection of pornography and particularly to a fascination with the intimate sexual practices of the colonial people they ruled over. Essentially, this group of imperialists looked down from the Olympian heights of their own racial and class position onto a metaphorical stage where the colonial peoples could be carefully examined and labeled while providing sexual titillation for the imperial masters.

The Cannibal club was founded in 1863 and grew out of the split between monogenists and polygenists in the Ethnological Society which had been formed in London in 1843. The monogenists, following Darwin's lead, believed that man, in spite of certain differences, constituted a single species and they tended towards liberal politics. The polygenists, on the other hand, believed in a multiple genesis of man and were a strongly conservative group with racist tendencies. The victory of the monogenists in the Ethnological Society led James Hunt and Richard Burton to set up a rival organization called "The Anthropological Society of London" with polygenist theories and a strong belief in the minute collection of data as a means of proving the differences between races. The Society was a supporter of such pseudo-scientific practices as phrenology and the measurement of skull size and shape with craniometers and other instruments of anatomical measurement. During the American Civil War, the Anthropological Society was a strong supporter of the Confederacy and its pro-slavery policies.

An off-shoot of the Anthropological Society was the Cannibal Club which promoted the beliefs of the Society in a more personal and Dionysian way (as with most men's clubs of the Victorian period, large quantities of alcohol were imbibed during the club's meetings). The basic idea was that a group of intelligent and intellectually advanced English gentlemen should celebrate their innate superiority over other racial and social groups through the discussion of topics that were normally off-bounds in academic circles. The topics for debate included sex, pornography, religion and race. Prominent members included Hunt, Burton, Swinburne and Monckton Milnes (Lord Houghton). The style and tenor of the club's meetings can be gauged by the fact that its symbol was a mace carved to

resemble an African head chewing on a thigh bone. Swinburne even wrote a Cannibal Catechism which was thought of as a kind of club anthem.

Preserve us from our enemies  
Thou who art Lord of suns and skies  
Whose meat and drink is flesh in pies  
And blood in bowls!  
Of thy sweet mercy, damn their eyes  
And damn their souls.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of its racism, the club was perhaps most interested in the perusal of pornography and members included several active collectors of pornography such as Sir James Plaisted Wilde, General Studholme, John Hodgson and Charles Duncan Cameron. Charles Bradlaugh, the well-known atheist, was also a member, emphasizing its generally iconoclastic tendencies. The club used to meet at a hotel near Fleet Street, though agendas and minutes were not kept—probably at least partly due to the extremely unpalatable views propagated. In James Hunt's opening speech to the Anthropological Society (mother of the Cannibal Club) he enunciated a strong racist view:

Whatever may be the conclusion to which our scientific inquiries may lead us, we should always remember, that by whatever means the Negro, for instance, acquired his present physical, mental and moral character, whether he has risen from an ape or descended from a perfect man, we still know that the Races of Europe have now much in their mental and moral nature which the races of Africa have not got.<sup>2</sup>

From 1864 Hunt had been promoting the idea of a merger between the Royal Anthropological Society and the British Association and in 1871 the Royal Anthropological Institute was founded. The Cannibal Club seems to have faded away in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the extreme views of many of its members never changed.

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Three academics who have written at some length about the Cannibal Club in recent years are Dane Kennedy, Lisa Z. Sigel and Deborah Lutz. Kennedy, in his 2005 book *The Highly Civilized Man*,<sup>3</sup> emphasizes the club's iconoclasm and anti-clericalism while not shying away from its elitism and racism. His central tenet is that the club's iconoclasm posed a real threat to the English ruling class by suggesting their morality and beliefs were not self-evidently true--and so to be automatically imposed on colonial peoples. Lisa Sigel in *Governing Pleasures. Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914*<sup>4</sup> relates the rise of pornography in the eighteenth century to the creation of new technology which made the mass printing of cheap images possible. Unlike Dane Kennedy, she is almost exclusively interested in the Cannibal Club from the perspective of pornography and its consumption by the British upper classes. Furthermore, she connects this to the rigid morality of the time and to the fear that the working classes would be corrupted if obscenity laws were not tightened and rigorously enforced by the ruling class. It is only a short step from this position to the belief that only the well-educated and well-connected were in a position to consume this material without being in some way morally corrupted. The Cannibal Club took advantage of this ambiguous space in British society to follow its own hedonistic agenda. Taking the Cannibals as symbolic of the British ruling class as a whole, Sigel puts forward the idea that their erotic preferences show how anthropology, science, empire and pornography developed simultaneously and how each was implicated in the discourse of the other.

Deborah Lutz's book *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*<sup>5</sup> is more problematic than the first two. On the one hand it spends much more time talking about the Cannibal Club *per se*; on the other, it has fewer original insights than either of the previously cited works. Lutz views the Cannibals in a romantic light as modern sexual animals surrounded by repression and bigotry which they are able to circumvent due to their highly educated but still passionate

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natures. There is nothing in Lutz's book of Kennedy's belief in the Cannibals' relativism posing as an active threat to the conventional morality of the time; nor of Sigel's interest to connect the consumption of pornography with social change in nineteenth century Britain. As a concluding comment on the treatment of the Cannibal Club by these three writers, it might be added that they have all made use of the same meager resources available on the Cannibal Club and given their own particular spin to the information.

Faced with this situation I decided to undertake a search for more primary documents that might throw greater light on the activities of the Cannibal Club. I cannot claim to have found a plenitude of new material, but some documents unearthed in the archives of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London have proved interesting. I remain hopeful that further research will be able to add new details to the story.

Perhaps the most interesting document I've discovered so far relates to a Cannibal Club dinner that took place on 19 June, 1866.<sup>6</sup> There is a list of names which does not include any of the usual suspects: Burton, Swinburne and Monckton Milnes. Twelve Cannibals dined on this evening in 1866, including the President, James Hunt. It's interesting that Hunt is also listed as Honorary Fellow of the Ethnological Society of London, so we can assume that there was a fair amount of crossover between the Anthropological and Ethnological societies. Certainly, it is possible 150 years after the events involved, to assume that the antagonism between these two bodies was greater in theory than in reality. Some of the other Cannibals dining that evening are obscure figures, but a little research can find out some interesting facts about several of the others. Richard Stephen Charnock PhD, a fairly prominent Victorian, is listed as the Treasurer. Charnock, whose address is given as Gray's Inn, was the solicitor to whom the young George Meredith was apprenticed. Meredith didn't study much law with Charnock, but the older man did encourage the novelist in his literary ambitions. Meredith even met his wife, Mary Ellen Nicolls among Charnock's circle of friends. Charnock's literary interests seemed to lie in the direction of philology and he authored several

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books on English dialects and the origins of geographical names. On the whole Charnock appears as a rather disappointing Cannibal solidly respectable, a solicitor and the writer of around ten books on legal and narrowly philological matters—most of which are now available on the Internet Archive.

Among the other Cannibals dining that evening in 1866 was a clergyman, the Reverend Dunbar Isidore Heath, a recognized authority on Egyptology and an early translator of the papyri in the British Museum. Heath seems to have been ruined both financially and professionally when his 1852 book *The Future Human Kingdom of Christ*<sup>7</sup> led, in 1861, to his prosecution for heresy by the Bishop of Winchester. Although this may seem a very Cannibalistic fate, the doctrine objected to by the Church of England involved Heath's ideas about "the two salvations" or the belief that the crucifixion of Jesus had, on one level, saved all men eternally, though a special and superior salvation awaited those who actively believed, through faith, in Jesus' atoning sacrifice.

Yet another Cannibal present at the dinner was Charles Carter Blake, anthropologist, paleontologist, and comparative anatomist. Blake was a founding fellow of the Anthropological Society of London and in 1864 edited Paul Broca's book *On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo*.<sup>8</sup> As well as being famous for discovering Broca's area of the brain, the renowned Frenchman also believed that the size of the brain determined intelligence and insisted on the fact that women were less intelligent than men due to the smaller size of their brains: ideas which were no doubt loudly applauded in the secretive meetings and convivial dinners of the Cannibal Club.

James Hunt, the President of the Anthropological Society and leading light of the Cannibal Club is well known for his extreme views on race. As a scientific researcher, however, he appears to have been something of a dilettante. He was the son of the famous speech therapist, Thomas Hunt and after buying a doctorate from the University of Giessen in Germany, he set himself up in practice as a speech therapist in Regent Street, London. After founding the Anthropological Society of

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London with Richard Burton in 1863, he became well-known for his extreme and racist views. In 1867 Hyde Clarke accused Hunt of financial irregularities in the running of the society causing his temporary resignation as president. However, he returned in 1868 after the expulsion of Clarke due to the scandal. Hunt died at the early age of thirty-three of an inflammation of the brain. Interestingly, it was only after Hunt's death that the Anthropological Society was prepared to begin negotiations with the Ethnological Society about the possibility of a merger. Presumably, with Hunt out of the way, the Anthropological Society was prepared to tone down some of its extremely intolerant views while the Ethnological Society largely gave up its humanitarian work, becoming more vigorously scientific in its outlook.

The Royal Anthropological Institute's archive has, beyond providing the names of prominent Cannibals whose letters might be researched for greater insights into the workings of this secretive organization, given some interesting information about exactly what became of the Cannibal Club. It would appear that the club was dissolved some time in 1869 through lack of interest. Apparently, Richard Burton tried to revive the club in the early eighteen-seventies, but without success. This was probably, at least in part, due to the decline of scientific racism and polygenism after the success of Darwin's *Origin of Species*<sup>9</sup> and, more specifically the publication of *The Descent of Man* in 1871<sup>10</sup> which set out a compelling argument for monogenism. At any rate, it seems the club did not continue after the amalgamation of the Anthropological Society and the Ethnological Society to form the RAI—or "Royal Anthropological Institute"—in 1871. However, a RAI dining club continued in various guises right up until 1965. In 1952 this club was reconstituted as the "Long Pig Club" which met at the Nag's Head pub in Floral Street, Covent Garden. The club's last dinner was on 3 June 1965 at the Universal Restaurant in London.<sup>11</sup> We may reasonably assume that the aggressively racist and pornographic agenda of the Cannibal Club was not perpetuated after 1869.

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It was certainly no accident that the Cannibal Club flourished in the eighteen-sixties as the British Empire continued its rapid growth; a mass of newly emerging information about various kinds of unusual cultural behavior and practices on the part of the expanding empire's new constituents, led some people in the educated British ruling class to ask questions about "difference" and "the other" that mostly came to reassuring answers for the colonial masters in the assertion of their own innate superiority over the millions of colonial people they controlled. Nevertheless, in the longer term, the developing relativism of Cannibal Club members like Richard Burton began to slowly turn the mirror image back on the voyeuristic observers themselves and, in the process, pose a fundamental question about how---in a world where nothing seemed clear-cut and where cultural practices had developed according to particular local needs---any one system of belief could be thought of as "true" or innately superior to another. Therefore, it might accurately be affirmed that although the Cannibal Club began its life as a purveyor of scientific racism, the intellectual honesty of some of its members eventually began to cast doubt on the idea of "civilizing" the empire's new subjects. Richard Burton, in particular, strongly objected to the Christianization of Africans and Asians and thought Islam provided a far more appropriate religious model for these people to follow. Consequently, it might be said that the Cannibal Club was also a profoundly ambiguous group which in spite of its overt racism and elitism, eventually began to question the value and efficacy of Christianizing and Europeanizing new inhabitants of the British Empire. It should be remembered that as the scientific method was gradually developed and refined throughout the course of the nineteenth-century, many ideas which had earlier been popular fell out of favor as they were discredited or refuted. Polygenism, or the belief in a multiple genesis of the human species would be one idea that simply became untenable with the passage of time.

Of course, ideas of racial superiority and inferiority have never been entirely absent from the debate on race and I would suggest that the modern "justification" for such ideas by twentieth-century National Socialists and others, goes back to the formation of the scientific method in the nineteenth century when many leading thinkers and scientists of the era were reluctant to accept the Darwinian conclusion

that all humanity had sprung from the same origins and, so, attempted to create doubt about these matters in order to support their own racist beliefs. Similarly, the modern tolerance for a private pornographic space is also, at least partly, dependent on the attitudes of elitist Victorians who secretly, and from an elevated and privileged position, looked down on the sexual activities of colonial people in a process of profound intellectual voyeurism. The importance of the “Cannibal Club”, in essence, was to create a secret space where racist and sexist attitudes could be confidently asserted and discussed amongst the most influential and important people of the day.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER THREE

1. Algernon Charles Swinburne, *The Cannibal Catechism* (London: printed for private circulation, 1913), p. 7.
2. James Hunt, President (February 24, 1863), *Introductory address on the study of Anthropology*, *The Anthropological Review*, 1, p. 3.
3. Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005)
4. Lisa Z. Sigel, *Governing Pleasures. Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914*, (Rutgers University Press, 2002).
5. Deborah Lutz, *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).
6. List of Cannibals dining 19<sup>th</sup> June 1866, (from A5/240), Royal Anthropological Institute of London.
7. Dunbar Isidore Heath, *The Future Human Kingdom of Christ*, (London: J.W. Parker, 1852).
8. Paul Broca, *On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo*, (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1864).

9. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, (London: John Murray, 1859). 10. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, (London: John Murray, 1871), 2 vols.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **BURTON, SAID AND POSTCOLONIAL THEORY: AN UNREASONABLE DISCOURSE**

The present chapter examines the ways in which the travels and journeys in Arabia and other Muslim lands of Richard Francis Burton, the nineteenth-century explorer and writer have, since the influential work of Edward W. Said on Orientalism, been somewhat undervalued by contemporaries. It aims to offer a re-evaluation of those works and their contribution to Victorian knowledge. It will also offer a challenge to Said's account of Burton and, particularly in the second part, look at ways in which Burton has been viewed more generally by post-colonial theorists since Said's influential work.

A further aim I have is to bring together the viewpoints on Burton of the biographers and postcolonial critics who appear to have previously worked largely in isolation from one another. It is my belief that such a union will lead to a mutually beneficial process of cross-fertilization that will reveal a more complicated—and also more accurate—Burton for detailed future consideration and discussion. Finally, it is my hope that the effect of allowing Burton to emerge in all his nuanced complexity will make it very clear that he is far too multi-faceted a figure to be placed permanently within the restrictive confines of Said's discourse on Orientalism. Therefore, my objective is to dissociate Burton from the Orientalist and postcolonial discourse and suggest that he can be better and more sympathetically viewed through the perspective of other discourses about the Victorian world such as those connected with travel writing, important nineteenth-century figures who were sympathetic to Islam, and the development of the scientific method.

**Part I**

Burton is still perhaps best remembered as the adventurer who penetrated Makkah disguised as a Muslim pilgrim, but his contribution to the infant scientific disciplines of his time such as ethnography, archaeology and comparative religion are generally under-appreciated and statements of praise about his achievements, muted. This is partly due to his own irascible temperament and tendency, in at least some of his works, to promote a kind of scientific racism (and even to flirt with such a pseudo-science as phrenology: the elucidation of character by the examination of skull shape). However, I would contend that the chief reason Burton is hardly given his due today is as a consequence of Edward Said's branding of him as an "Orientalist": that blanket word of condemnation that can mean so little or so much. As I will argue in the later part of the present essay, this underestimation has continued in the work of latter-day post-colonial theorists right up until the present.

In his Preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Orientalism*, Said says the following about his views of Orientalist methods as opposed to genuine research:

What I do argue also is that there is a difference between knowledge of other peoples and other times that is the result of understanding, compassion, careful study and analysis for their own sakes, and on the other hand knowledge—if that is what it is—that is part of an overall campaign of self-affirmation, belligerency, and outright war.<sup>1</sup>

According to Said, "Orientalism" is a kind of pseudo-academic discipline created for the purpose of subjugating the East to European—and latterly—American power. Said, in his Introduction (written in 2003), argues convincingly that the reasons for the Iraqi war were based on the need to secure the flow of oil rather than on any disinterested concern for liberty and democracy in the region.

Even with all its terrible failings and its appalling dictator (who was partly created by U.S. policy two decades ago), were Iraq to have been the world's largest exporter of bananas or oranges, surely there would have been no war....<sup>2</sup>



In other words, Orientalism—an activity that commences seriously from the time of Napoleon's entry into Egypt in 1798—has taken on new forms and expressions in the modern world, but largely remains the same aggressive imperialist activity that began more than 200 years ago.

Twenty-five years after its publication, *Orientalism* once again raises the question of whether modern imperialism ever ended, or whether it has continued in the Orient since Napoleon's entry into Egypt two centuries ago.<sup>3</sup>

More recent work in the field of travel literature as genre and ideology—one of the areas that has been the focus of increased scholarly and critical attention since the first publication of *Orientalism*--can be said to be sympathetic to Said's essential arguments. For example, Mary Louise Pratt in her important book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, emphasizes how encounters in what she calls "the contact zone" between imperialists and colonial peoples have taken place on an unequal footing between exploiters and the exploited. The book's "predominant theme" is: "how travel books by Europeans about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the domestic subject of Euro-imperialism; how they have engaged metropolitan reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits accrued mainly to the very few."<sup>4</sup>

As is the case with Said's *Orientalism*, there is much to be said for this argument (colonialism was clearly never conducted for the benefit of the colonized). However, also like Said, Pratt's argument sometimes suffers from its polemical exclusivity. A critic might make the point that such writings have reduced travel to imperialism and travel writing to imperialist propaganda. It might be further pointed out that this view of travel writing has rather lost sight of the global context of travel and travel writing, which has by no means been an exclusively European activity. Ibn Battuta, for example, the fourteenth-century Moroccan traveler, visited India, China and Tanzania. Furthermore, he left a record of his extensive travels in the *Rihla*, or "Journey" which he dictated to a scholar whom he had met in Grenada called Ibn Juzayy. Although possibly fictional in parts, the *Rihla* still gives a compelling and unique account of the fourteenth-century world.<sup>5</sup>

In her book *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge,*

*and Geographical Distance*, anthropologist Mary W. Helms, while recognizing the frequently important connection between travel writing and imperialism, situates travel writing in a wider global and thematic perspective.<sup>6</sup> According to Helms, travel to foreign lands is undertaken for a multiplicity of reasons (including political, social, economic, and cultural) and these interests can be said to fuel the human desire to travel in search of communication and exchange. However, travel does not reduce simply to imperialism, nor travel accounts to imperialist propaganda. On this view, it might be said that Pratt-- and Said, too--have offered an insightful but Eurocentric view of European travelers.

Robert J. C. Young in his first book, *White Mythologies*<sup>7</sup> also emphasizes the ways in which Europe has replicated itself in the rest of the world. History, contends Young (and particularly Marxist history), has always seen Europe as being at the center of things with the rest of the world portrayed as dormant and quiescent. However, Young is also critical of Said's emphasis on the importance of the intellectual in changing the world and his mistake (according to Young) in seeing the battle of oppositional ideas within traditional concepts of "high culture".<sup>8</sup>

Ever since the time of its first publication in 1978, Said's concept of Orientalism as a pseudo-academic discipline has had severe critics. For example, Bernard Lewis comes in for scathing criticism in *Orientalism* as a prime example of the kind of self-serving academic with a hidden imperialist agenda who has corrupted all reasonable academic treatment of Oriental themes.<sup>9</sup> Lewis makes some interesting would-be rebuttals to Said--that are often not without merit--in his 1982 article, "The Question of Orientalism," which appeared in the *New York Review of Books*. Perhaps most importantly he emphasizes how, historically speaking, Orientalism is merely a descriptive term for an area of intellectual research, being no more than a branch of historical and ethnographical knowledge (not unlike "Hellenism" or "Hebraism").

What then is Orientalism? In the past, Orientalism was used mainly in two senses. One is a school of painting -- that of a group of artists, mostly from Western Europe, who visited the Middle East and North Africa and

depicted what they saw or imagined sometimes in a rather romantic and extravagant manner. The second and more common meaning, unconnected with the first, has been a branch of scholarship.<sup>10</sup>

Lewis here argues that Orientalism was originally no more than a useful term for the description and analysis of Eastern languages and culture--though it is perhaps a little disturbing that he sees no connection between Orientalism as a style of painting and as a specific type of scholarship. No doubt his opponents would discern a clear relationship between the earlier florid and exaggerated painting style and the later academic discipline. After all, both might be considered Euro-centric, a way of seeing the East through Western eyes in an essentially unreal way. Nevertheless, Lewis goes on to accurately point out that Orientalists at this time were essentially philologists.

Basically these early scholars were philologists concerned with the recovery, study, publication, and interpretation of texts...The term Orientalist was not at that time as vague and imprecise as it appears now.<sup>11</sup>

Lewis contends that Said ignores the long and very real contribution that the Orientalists have made to knowledge, such as the decipherment of the Egyptian hieroglyphics in the aftermath of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798.<sup>12</sup> He also points out that interest in the Middle East had existed in Europe since at least Renaissance times—a period long before the onset of European colonialism.<sup>13</sup>

Orientalism then, according to Lewis, is a critical discipline with a long history of honest research:

The most important question -- least mentioned by the current wave of critics -- is that of the scholarly merits, indeed the scholarly validity, of Orientalist findings. Prudently, Mr. Said has hardly touched on this question, and has indeed given very little attention to the scholarly writings of the scholars whose putative attitudes, motives, and purposes form the theme of his book.<sup>14</sup>

Martin Kramer (who had his PhD thesis supervised by Lewis) is another scholar who is skeptical of Said's achievements. Much of his book, *Ivory Towers on Sand*,<sup>15</sup> is an attack on Said's *Orientalism*. He begins by stating that Said

himself came from a well-to-do background<sup>16</sup> and was considered simply as a member of the academic elite until the late nineteen-seventies and his opportune discovery of a new radical identity--just at a time when journalists were desperately seeking out articulate views on the Palestinian question. Thus, his suggestion is that Said was something of an ambitious charlatan even from the beginning:

In the years that followed, Said evolved into a public intellectual, meeting the growing American demand for a Palestinian perspective...Said was combative in argumentation and concise in formulation, and he entered their Rolodexes immediately.<sup>17</sup>

According to Kramer, Said took only those examples from history and literature that were in tune with his own view point, in the process ignoring far more relevant examples that would have contributed towards disproving his theories (particularly the importance of Germany—a country without 'oriental' colonies—in developing European knowledge about 'the Orient'). Kramer states that over the last twenty years Said's views have been discredited by scholars from many different disciplines. However, they have all agreed on the one essential point: that Said selectively chose his examples in order to suit his case. The inclusion of contrary arguments would have toppled Said's thesis, since it demonstrated that the Western understanding and representation of the East—especially the Arabs and Islam—had grown ever more ambivalent, nuanced, and diverse.<sup>18</sup>

Kramer also argues that Said's *Orientalism* appeared at a particularly sensitive time in American history, when lots of academics from abroad were seeking university positions. Orientalism, and the later development of post-colonial criticism, gave them a significant boost in their search. Suddenly, they were the experts, like Said himself, on the new inter-disciplinary theory of post-colonialism.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, according to Kramer, there was the mostly unexpressed belief that only the exploited could accurately depict the actual process of exploitation--even given the fact that most of these new intellectuals, like Said himself, had come from well-to-do backgrounds. Kramer also assigns Said's influence to the coincidence of Orientalism with a particular moment in the

history of the left in the academy:

*Orientalism* also arrived at a crucial moment in the evolution of third worldism in American academe. By 1978, the enthusiasm for third world revolutions had ebbed among American intellectuals...But an entire generation of leftist scholars nurtured on radical commitments had already made their way through doctoral programs, and desperately needed a manifesto to carry them over the next hurdle.<sup>20</sup>

Kramer is often more concerned with the politics of the academy than with Said's analysis of Orientalism. On the other hand, if he is correct in his analysis, a significant link emerges between the success of Said's book and the academic politics of the time.

In 2006, historian and novelist Robert Irwin published his critique of Said's thesis, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents*.<sup>21</sup> Asked about the necessity for such a book, Irwin repeated Lewis's earlier argument about the need to protect the intellectual heritage of the Orientalists themselves. However, he also makes one comment of a personal kind that does, one feels, instinctively act as a genuine criticism of Said and his supporters.

I also got irritated with people who thought that my researches in the Mamluk Sultanate in late medieval Egypt and Syria necessarily had some sort of sinister agenda. Even my wife seemed to favor this notion.<sup>22</sup>

As a historian, Irwin criticizes Said harshly for ignoring German Orientalism and Russian designs on the southern Caucasus region. Furthermore, he berates Said for a general lack of historical knowledge concerning the roots of Orientalism:

To point out the obvious, Said was not a historian. He had no idea then how very few universities there were in 17th, 18th and 19th centuries Europe — and most of these were in Germany...If there were as many as half a dozen academic Arabists in Britain in the early 19th century I would be astonished.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, the more severe critics of Said's work have long since been in a vocal minority. The central tenets of *Orientalism* have, by this time, been mostly accepted--and often with enthusiasm--in the majority of Western universities.

However, this does not mean that Said's ideas have received universal praise, even by his advocates. Many scholars, such as Maya Jassanoff, are able to see the discrepancies in Said's text (the bias, the ignoring of Germany and Russia, the careful arrangement of detail with the object of reaching a pre-ordained conclusion), but are yet able to praise him for his far-seeing intellectual vision.

In a review of Irwin's book, *For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies*, she criticizes Irwin's piece-meal objections to Said's work and insists that, to be taken seriously, such criticism needs to confront Said on the ideological battlefield itself:

Given that Said's work hinges on the argument that imperial power drives Orientalism (and vice versa), a book challenging him ought to address these issues head on.<sup>24</sup>

When Maya Jassanoff refers to Irwin needing to confront Said on the "ideological battlefield", she is no doubt referring to the structuring of Said's argument in the form of a Foucauldian discourse and the latter's idea that the knowledge contained in every discourse is designed to give power to someone, or, some group of people. Foucault had insisted upon the relativity of ethics and morality and had come to the conclusion that "discourses" were only consistent within their own logical parameters: it was meaningless to criticize a discourse or its view of morality and ethics from a position outside the discourse itself. In other words, the world was filled with mutually exclusive discourses and each of them could only be called "moral" in so far as the ethics and principles valued within them were accepted by the adherents of each. Criticism, from outside the parameters of the discourse, were viewed as, literally, meaningless. More sinister, was Foucault's belief that every discourse of knowledge was created in order to confer power on a particular group of people.<sup>25</sup> In this view, Foucault was not far away from the ultimate position of Ludwig Wittgenstein who had also stressed the relativity of logic in linguistic terms: the world didn't consist of a single logic but many logics each of which operated according to its own rules.<sup>26</sup>

Said, following Foucault's ideas on discourse, at one point in *Orientalism* makes clear how problematic it is for a discourse—in this case the discourse of

“Orientalism”—to treat of “truth” in any fundamental way:

Islam *has* been fundamentally misrepresented in the West--the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer. If the latter alternative is the correct one (as I believe it is), then we must be prepared to accept the fact that a representation is *eo ipso* implicated, intertwined, embedded, interwoven with a great many other things besides the “truth” which is itself a representation.<sup>27</sup>

Of course this idea of Said’s, intended as it is to undermine the West’s view of Islam, also, obliquely, acts as a criticism of his own discourse against “Orientalism”.

The post-colonial critic Robert J. C. Young has also emphasized the importance of Foucault to Said and to post-colonial theory in general. In his essay, “Foucault On Race and Colonialism”, Young stresses the importance of Foucault’s idea that every discourse represents a form of violence and a way of knowing that has more to do with the needs of a dominant ideology than any unbiased concern with some independent notion of truth.

According to Foucault, discourse always involves a form of violence in the way it imposes its linguistic order on the world...Following Foucault, Said argued that Orientalism was less a body of objective scholarly knowledge, than a discursive construction, whose conceptual structure determined the way in which the West understood the East.<sup>28</sup>

It is easy to see then that for many of Said’s supporters, in *Orientalism*, he had created a Foucauldian discourse that was water tight in its own terms. It applied a particular logic to the phenomenon of colonialism and the exploited peoples of the world and came up with answers that were suitable to both liberal academics and to the oppressed. Said, following Foucault, had created a discourse that related knowledge to power—and particularly Orientalist knowledge to the control of colonial lands and peoples. If anyone disagreed, let them realize the impotence of their criticisms for as long as their objections originated from a position outside the parameters of the discourse itself: such criticisms belonged to another discourse

that had nothing to do with Said's. Of course, the greatest potential weakness of Said's use of the Foucauldian discourse also lies within this relativity. If Foucault is correct, then other discourses can be created with opposite conclusions to Said's—and within their own terms they too will be equally unassailable to outside criticism. Where everything is relative, no single point of view can be final. However, the higher the number of people that subscribe to a particular discourse, the more chance there is that this view will be accepted by most people as the common one.

It might usefully be added at this point, that although most Eastern and "Oriental" scholars embraced Said's vision enthusiastically, his ideas have not always been accepted with enthusiasm by Arab and Muslim intellectuals. Aijaz Ahmed, Albert Hourani and Irfan Habib have all expressed their reservations about Said's work.<sup>29</sup>

Of particular interest in the context of Said's Orientalist interpretation of Richard Francis Burton's life and work is Irfan Habib who has criticized Said for ignoring normal academic boundaries between subjects and regarding all academics who deal with the "Orient", whatever their discipline, as "Orientalists":

But such basic work is only incidental to Said's definition of Orientalism, which has its scope enlarged to take in the discourse of anyone who teaches about, or researches the Orient...Soon enough Said forgets the professional boundaries of teacher and researcher. Journalists, novelists and politicians appear with quiet ease on his pages as "Orientalists" wherever they have a statement to make that Said wishes to attribute to "Orientalism".<sup>30</sup>

Habib goes on to suggest that Said has constructed a monster which insists that all negative views of the Orient and Islam that come from the West are examples of the hated "Orientalism" and so tainted and to be ignored:

Despite Said's denials that it was not his intention to protect chauvinistic or conservative beliefs in Asia, especially in relation to Islam, one can see that any critical or historical view of any aspect of Islam by any western scholar is yet taken by him as reflective of a sense of western superiority and so a kind of 'Orientalist', colonial discourse.<sup>31</sup>

Habib gives the word "Mohammedan" as an example of this paranoia. He points



out that in Persia innumerable Muslim scholars have, for centuries, spoken of the “Muhammedan faith” and “Muhammedan law” (“Din-i-Muhammadi” and “Shariat-i Muhammadi”). However, in the modern world (thanks to Orientalism):

[T]he word ‘Mohammedan’ is quickly disappearing from books, and even from titles of works by authors, long dead: thus Goldziher’s *Mohammedanische Studien* and H A R Gibb’s *Mohammedanism* now reappear in print respectively as *Muslim Studies* (English translation) and *Islam* in editions by established academic publishers. An innocent designation becomes disreputable the moment it is found to be tainted through association with that pernicious weed, “Orientalism”.<sup>32</sup>

Echoing other critics such as Lewis and Irwin, Habib makes the point that the discovery of knowledge is, in itself, without ideology. He insists that much of the scholarship dismissed by Said as “Orientalist” has made real contributions to our view of the past.

When, on page 203, Said concedes that the work of ‘innumerable’ Orientalists has consisted in editing and translating texts, codifying grammars, establishing lexical meanings, and reconstructing ‘dead epochs’, he fails to recognize that this very work, irrespective of the conservative or liberal views of the individual scholars concerned, results in continuously altering our fundamental notions of the past as well as the present.<sup>33</sup>

Habib goes on to speak of I Goldziher who was an anti-Zionist Jew, who received his post-graduate university education at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and professed to have an equal respect for all three revealed, monotheistic religions hailing from the Middle East:

For the part of Orientalism Said closes his eyes to...such extremely influential figures as I Goldziher (a Hungarian, incidentally, not a German—contra Said, p. 18) who would hardly fit Said’s perception of an ‘Orientalist’. Classical master of hadis-criticism, Goldziher was an anti-Zionist Jew, who received his ‘post-graduate’ education at al-Azhar and professed the same critical respect for Islam as for Judaism and Christianity. Where would such a man be placed in Said’s scheme?<sup>34</sup>

According to Habib, Said has ignored Goldziher because he did not fit into his easy category of Orientalist/Imperialist. Of course, one reason Said was able to do

this was because Goldziher is hardly well known. Richard Francis Burton, on the other hand, was a giant of the period. Said could not ignore him; so, instead, he sought to denigrate both him and his achievement (impersonally enough, it should be stated). It will be the essential aim of the next part of this discussion to illustrate the various ways in which Said misinterpreted the evidence available to construct a Richard Burton that fitted easily into his theories on “Orientalism”, but did not reflect the truth about the real man.

## Part II

We can say that—like almost any author of note—Burton has been regarded in different ways by biographers and interested scholars, since his death towards the end of the nineteenth century. Largely, these interpretations have been positive and generous to a man who took many risks with his own life and made many interesting and useful discoveries during the course of a comparatively long life by nineteenth-century standards. However, since the publishing of Said’s theories, his reputation has, inevitably, become rather tarnished in academic circles. For example, in her book *Imperial Eyes* Mary Louise Pratt describes Burton as an example of the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” explorer and gives a long quotation from the latter’s description of his first discovery of Lake Tanganyika.<sup>35</sup> Similarly David Spurr, in his book *The Rhetoric of Empire*, refers to Pratt’s earlier comments on Burton and the way in which “the landscape is...described so as to subordinate it to the power of the speaker.”<sup>36</sup> Here, Spurr is in concordance with both Pratt and Said in the view that Burton’s “imperial eyes” in some way “subordinate” the exotic world he perceives to his own control and to the control of his imperialist masters.

In *Orientalism*, Said says a fair deal about Richard Burton and, in spite of a sense of Burton’s superiority over most Orientalists of the time, he still finishes by placing him squarely in the imperialistic/Orientalist camp, labeling him as being perhaps all the more dangerous for his apparent individualism and sympathy for the Orient.<sup>37</sup> This has done a disservice to the reputation of Burton who should be

considered on his own terms and for his own writings and discoveries, rather than as an addendum to Said's theories on Orientalism and imperialism. In particular, Said has little or nothing to say about Burton's contribution to our modern view of religion, which is mostly seen in the West from a relativist position which lies outside the categories of faith themselves. Dane Kennedy, in his recent book, *The Highly Civilized Man* makes this contribution clear.

Yet even as Burton positioned himself as an exponent of 'scientific' racism, he also marshaled this understanding of racial difference as innate and immutable to challenge European universalist claims that its own civilization was unsurpassed and supplied a model for others to emulate. Because those claims were so closely bound up with Christianity, he deployed his knowledge of other systems of belief...to demonstrate that each was embedded within its own particular historical and cultural context, precluding the possibility that any single system of religion enjoyed a monopoly on truth.<sup>38</sup>

Kennedy also develops this point in a highly specific way relating to Burton's inability to wholly accept the doctrines of any religion as "true":

Burton exhibited an intellectual curiosity in religions of all sorts, but this curiosity never carried over into the unquestioning commitment of the devout believer... Ironically, what motivated this catholicity of interest was his deep skepticism about any religion's claim to absolute truth.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to his contribution to the development of this relativist view of religion, Burton made many contributions to geography, anthropology, ethnography and the study of comparative religions—his impartiality in such matters was most clearly instanced by his own belief in the superiority of Islam over Christianity at a time when most scholars and ordinary people in the West viewed Islam as an essentially blasphemous religion appropriate only for barbarians. To this extent, Burton would seem to appear as the antithesis of the traditional Orientalist, collecting data about foreign cultures with the intention of proving his own society's views to be superior. Kennedy is enlightening on the ways in which Burton's methods and conclusions could be turned against the imperialists themselves in order to deny the absolute truth of any one religion:

Difference became for Burton the basis for critical enquiry, capable of being turned in any direction, not least against Britain itself...Once he understood that difference itself was a neutral epistemological device, a polarity that contained no inherent meaning, he began to wield it in ways that challenged the universalist claims of British society.<sup>40</sup>

From this point of view, then, it would be reductionistic to view Burton as a mere advanced servant of imperialism who happened to have a particularly good understanding of the Orientalist canon and, consequently, was in a better position than most to utilize it in the service of his Western masters. Such a view of Burton does not do justice to the genuine originality and impartiality of much of his thought, and Said's caricature of Burton's ideas and motives, as explained in *Orientalism*, begins to be revealed as mere polemic. On the contrary, as Kennedy suggests, many of Burton's conclusions about religion and power subtly undermined the absolutist claims of Western societies to be "right" in their dealings with colonial peoples.

Burton, of course, lived at a pivotal time for the development of new scientific methods and disciplines. *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859<sup>41</sup> and Burton was quick to declare himself a believer in evolution.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in 1871, Edward Burnett Tylor made the study of anthropology scientific with his ground-breaking work *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, which immediately became the standard treatise on anthropology.<sup>43</sup> Of particular importance in challenging the monotheistic faith of Victorian society was Tylor's insistence that religion was a universal activity within the family of man that was characterized by a belief in "spiritual beings".<sup>44</sup> Moreover, Tylor pursued his anthropological research from an evolutionist perspective, lending his powerful support to Darwin's controversial theories.<sup>45</sup> These scientific, philosophical and social contexts in which Burton worked are also of significance in evaluating his very real achievements.

### Part III

I will conclude with a brief look at the ways in which Burton has been viewed by scholars, academics and ordinary people from his own time right down to (and even beyond) the influential portrayal of Burton as “Orientalist” *par excellence* by Said towards the end of the twentieth century.

The first biography of Burton was written by his wife, Isabel, in 1893.<sup>46</sup> This provides a picture of Burton as seen by an adoring wife and is diminished by a wish to always show the writer in a favorable light. The manuscript ran to 1300 pages and two volumes, and Isabel refused to allow any outside influence. The book is often unwieldy and unchronological, but is inclusive of lots of information about Burton that only a wife could know about. She is also surprisingly fair-minded about Burton’s religious outlook, seeming to be well aware of her husband’s catholicity of tastes and fondness for Islam and Sufism.

I am by no means going to tell you that his Catholicity was a life-long, fixed and steady thing, like mine. It was not. He had long and wild fits of Eastern Mysticism, but not the Agnosticism that I have seen in England since my widowhood. It was the mysticism of the East—Sufism. Periodically he had Catholic fits, and practiced it, hiding it sometimes even from me, though I knew it.<sup>47</sup>

Isabel goes on to suggest how even Burton’s intimate friends would not have agreed on his faith:

Most of his intimate friends are dead but there are still a few left . . . who might possibly write sections of his life. . . . One would describe him as a Deist, one as an Agnostic, and one as an Atheist and Freethinker, but I can only describe the Richard that I knew, not the Richard they knew. I, his wife, who lived with him day and night for thirty years, believed him to be half-Sufi, half Catholic.<sup>48</sup>

Isabel’s biography of her husband was published on 11 July 1893. Most of the reviews were positive, agreeing with the opinion of the *Edinburgh Review* that “this is a very extraordinary book, by a very extraordinary woman about a very extraordinary man.”<sup>49</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, in her biography of Burton, *The Devil Drives*, is more ambivalent in her assessment of Isabel’s great “source” book:

Although she professed to admire Richard as ‘a spade-truth man,’ she held rigorously to the rule she had set for herself at marriage, ‘Hide his faults from everyone’.<sup>50</sup>

Only a few months after Isabel’s death, Burton’s niece, Georgiana Stisted, came out with a second biography that aimed at rectifying what she believed to be Isabel’s distortions and lies. In particular, she wished to distance her uncle from the Catholic Church and to upbraid the wife for her destruction of substantial parts of Burton’s writing after his death. As Kennedy comments:

The distinguishing intent of this biography was to wrench the memory of Georgiana’s uncle from the clutches of his widow, a woman she described as suffering from a “fatal want of tact and judgment”, and, by extension, from the Catholic Church, which she regarded as a haven of “human folly and superstition”.<sup>51</sup>

Leaving aside Stisted’s view of the marriage, the issue of Burton’s religious position is obviously important.

Other biographies appeared on a fairly regular basis in the years that followed. Most of these concentrated on the figure of Burton as a brave adventurer in Arabian lands, possessing titles such as, *Burton: Arabian Nights Adventurer* (1931), *The Arabian Night* (1936), and *Death Rides a Camel* (1936).<sup>52</sup> The first of these, by Thomas Wright and published in 1906, created a storm by its contention that most of Burton’s translation of the *Nights* was stolen from John Payne. Robert Irwin in his *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* is skeptical about this.<sup>53</sup> Certainly the accusation infuriated the remaining members of Burton’s family (mostly cousins). The fact that Burton had been collecting manuscripts from the *Nights*’ stories and translating them for twenty five years before he ever met Payne (and while journeying all over the world), would seem to disprove Wright’s theory. Moreover, Wright did not speak Arabic and was hardly in a position to expertly judge.

Subsequent biographies of Burton were more in the accepted mold of unstinting praise for an English hero. Dane Kennedy writes:

The adventurous man of action would become the most popular and enduring of the many representations of Burton. It sustained a steady stream of biographies, supplying vicarious thrills for those who sought imaginative release from the monotonous confines of modern urban society.<sup>54</sup>

And Kennedy is surely right when he suggests that Burton the adventurer has served as the model for many individuals who wanted to experience the same adventures and deprivations as their hero.

Harry St. John Philby sought to model himself after Burton . . . Wilfred Thesiger allowed himself to imagine he was back in Burton's days. . . . More recently, the Canadian financier and philanthropist Christopher Ondaatje and the English novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin have drawn inspiration from Burton in their efforts to conjoin authorship and adventure.<sup>55</sup>

Kennedy makes the point that amongst the hagiography, many essential elements of Burton's character were overlooked: his love of Islam, his anti-semitism, his racism and his ecumenical interest in religions of all sorts.<sup>56</sup>

Since the war and changes in the laws concerning public decency,<sup>57</sup> much attention has been given to Burton's sexual writings, and his *Kama Sutra* and *Arabian Nights* remain popular translations to this day, despite the somewhat archaic language. After the war, Burton was given much credit for his journeys in Africa to find the source of the Nile. The BBC production "The Search for the Nile" (1971) sparked renewed interest in Burton's role in this regard (as well as narrating a compelling personal drama in terms of Burton's rivalry with Speke).

More recently have come the biographies of Fawn M. Brodie, *The Devil Drives* (1967), Edward Rice, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton* (1990), and Mary S. Lovell, *A Rage to Live* (1998).<sup>58</sup> The first of these, Fawn M. Brodie's biography, devotes a lot of attention to psycho-analyzing Burton. Although it can now appear a little dated in its determination to get to the bottom of Burton's sexual character, many of the insights seem just (especially those that speak of Burton's relationship with his wife, Isabel). Edward Rice's is a most thorough and detailed biography, sometimes marred by his tendency to view Burton from the point of view of a twentieth-century hashish-taking adventurer. One of its major flaws is that many of Rice's conjectures about Burton's sexual appetite and amorous adventures are

put forward as if they were facts. On the other hand, Rice is very good on the early Burton as an officer in Sind, and he puts forward convincing (if far from conclusive) evidence that as a young man Burton, very likely, viewed himself as a Sufi Muslim. However, this insight is also marred by Rice's tendency to make conjecture seem like fact.

Perhaps the most satisfying recent biography of Burton has been Mary Lovell's *A Rage to Live*.<sup>59</sup> This is a vast and most meticulously researched biography that re-establishes Isabel as an essential ingredient to any true intellectual understanding of Burton's life. Kennedy enthusiastically calls this "The most impressively researched and reliable life of Burton".<sup>60</sup> Lovell's work is based on primary materials not available to earlier biographers. In spite of this advantage her biography, although exhaustive, remains undogmatic.

Most of these latter biographies were written by American scholars and it is informative to note how the more interesting research on Burton, at least for the present, is coming from over the Atlantic. Perhaps Burton's understanding for Arab lands is of particular relevance today when much of America's foreign policy has its most important terms of reference in the Middle East.

The last significant work on Burton, though not a biography as such, is also written by an American. Dane Kennedy's *The Highly Civilized Man* was published in 2005. Kennedy is a historian at George Washington University and uses Burton as an important and seminal figure of the nineteenth century to better understand this period of British imperialism and the emergence of a scientific view of reality. He is particularly interested in Burton as an intellectual relativist who did much to help develop the modern day scientific attitude to phenomena. Unlike many previous writers on Burton, Kennedy does not turn away from confronting Burton's racism and anti-semitism, seeing them as manifestations of some wrong-headed relativist thinking (primarily the need to categorize and judge).<sup>61</sup>

The most important late-twentieth-century view of Burton I have left until last, though some aspects of it were touched upon earlier. This is the view of Burton espoused by Said in *Orientalism*. Unlike the other scholars we have looked at, Said doesn't concern himself too much with Burton's life and achievements in any direct way. Rather, as I suggested earlier, he fits Burton into a supporting role



within his own theory of “Orientalism”. As Said’s book has proved far more influential than any of the biographies (or other books) we have looked at so far,<sup>62</sup> it might reasonably be asserted that it is his view of Burton that has come to dominate--and in my view, unfairly--present day discussions about Burton and his work’s significance. We earlier looked at Said’s ideas in brief, but now it is necessary to examine his views on Orientalism and Burton’s place within it in more detail and depth.

Said’s book on Orientalism was first published in 1978, but since then it has been reprinted many times. It has, furthermore, become very much a seminal text for those post-colonial critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Robert Young whose concern has been to look at the ways in which the world and its ideologies have become fragmented in the post-imperialist period.<sup>63</sup>

The basic premise of *Orientalism* (which, simply put, is the profound bias of Western knowledge about the Orient) is accepted as ‘true’ from the beginning and all the details arranged in such a way as to support the broad argument. As a result, thanks to Said, Burton is most usually viewed as a brilliant Orientalist scholar whose peculiar but undeniably effective methods and actions were put at the service of his imperialist masters (as we have earlier seen in the views of Pratt and Spurr). I feel that this is an over-simplified view of a highly ambiguous figure: Burton was undoubtedly his own man and by no means an imperialist puppet. Said begins by noting the positive aspects of Burton:

As a traveling adventurer Burton conceived of himself as sharing the life of the people in whose lands he lived. Far more successfully than T.E. Lawrence, he was able to become an Oriental; he not only spoke the language flawlessly, he was able to penetrate to the heart of Islam and, disguised as an Indian Muslim doctor, accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet Burton’s most extraordinary characteristic is, I believe, that he was preternaturally knowledgeable about the degree to which human life in society was governed by rules and codes...So what we read in his prose is the history of a consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture by virtue of having successfully absorbed its systems of information and behavior.<sup>64</sup>

Having described Burton’s *Pilgrimage* as “the history of a consciousness negotiating its way through an alien culture”, Said then argues that Burton’s

absorption of the systems of information (and) behavior of this culture “elevates Burton’s consciousness to a position of supremacy over the Orient”.<sup>65</sup>

Said’s description of Burton’s ‘preternatural knowledge’ and his absorption of the culture’s ‘systems of information’ are made to sound like the categorizing Orientalist method itself. However, it could just as easily be interpreted (and in my view, also more accurately) as an early attempt by a relativist to help define a scientific method of enquiry. I would go so far as to say that while there is indisputable truth in Said’s view of Orientalism (and Burton’s role within both it and the process of British colonization) as something that grew up and was perpetuated in the context of Western dominance over the East, it might also be seen (on a grander scale) as part of the crystallization of ‘systems of knowledge’ into a new and relativistic scientific method of enquiry (which was gathering pace in the late nineteenth century and beginning to threaten long-held religious views—and not without generating much controversy).<sup>66</sup>

Burton, in my opinion, is better judged from this latter perspective rather than from the somewhat narrow “Orientalist” view which results in him being categorized as a mere soldier of fortune, living off his wits, in the service of his imperialist masters. Undoubtedly, Said’s position on Burton (as well as that of many of his subsequent followers) is unconvincing in several ways. Burton, for example, was by no means the chameleon Said suggests, effortlessly fitting in during his journeys around the world due to his understanding of society’s “codes” and “rules”. His dismissal from the Damascus consulship for hot-headedness, and his extreme discomfort as a student at Oxford due to his continental manners, clearly demonstrate this. More importantly, and as we have seen, Said ignores Burton’s very real contributions to Victorian knowledge and to the development of the scientific method. However, such an interpretation does enable Said to—wrongly, in my opinion—position Burton clearly within and as a part of the great Orientalist conspiracy.

To summarize, I would contend that the Burton Said created in his book *Orientalism* was a pantomime monster, totally lacking the subtlety and complexity of the real man. In consequence of this and of the subsequent demonization of Burton by post-colonialist critics who followed Said’s lead on the matter, Burton,

although still much admired by ordinary readers and biographers, has unfairly become something of a pariah in serious academic circles. It is my modest hope that this book might make at least a small contribution to the redressing of the balance.

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#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979) xix.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalism* xx.

<sup>3</sup> *Orientalism* xxi-xxii.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Studies in Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 4.

<sup>5</sup> See L.P. Harvey, *Ibn Battuta (Makers of Islamic Civilization)* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2008) 5: "It is impossible to state with any certainty when precisely the narrative of the *Travels* began to take shape orally, but with some confidence we may say that the version we have began to come together when, having returned to his native Morocco, after traversing virtually every country then known to Muslims and on occasions adventuring beyond the bounds of that known world, Ibn Battuta recounted at the court of Abu 'Inan in Fez the wonders he had seen. Ibn Juzayy who wrote it all down for Ibn Battuta, did so under orders from Abu 'Inan".

<sup>6</sup> Mary W. Helms, *Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988) 78-80.

<sup>7</sup> Robert J.C Young, *White Mythologies* (New York, Routledge, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Young 132-133.

<sup>9</sup> *Orientalism*, 314-321.

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism", *The New York Review of Books*, 24 June 1982. This article is of intrinsic interest due to its appearance just a few years after Said's book and also because of its attempt to provide a rebuttal of *Orientalism*'s argument by the one "Orientalist" who had probably come in for the most scathing criticism of all by Said.

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis 3.

<sup>12</sup> Although the Rosetta stone was later expropriated by the British and put on display in the British Museum, it was a Frenchman, Jean-Francois Champollion who was most influential in eventually breaking the hieroglyphic code. For a full consideration of Champollion's achievement in its historical context see: Daniel Meyerson, *The Linguist and the Emperor: Napoleon and Champollion's Quest to Decipher the Rosetta Stone* (New York: Random House, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> See Albert Hourani, *Islam in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 1. "From the time it first appeared, the religion of Islam was a problem for Christian Europe. Those who believed in it were the enemy on the frontier...The relationship between Muslims and European Christians, however, was not simply one of holy war, of crusade and of *jihad*. There was trade across the Mediterranean, and the balance of it changed in course of time; from the eleventh and twelfth centuries onwards the Italian ports expanded their trade, and, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, ships from the ports of Northern Europe began to appear in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean."

<sup>14</sup> Lewis, "The Question of Orientalism", p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Martin S. Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near Eastern Studies, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> It is perhaps surprising that at the time of writing, no important biography of Said has yet appeared. In his own recollection of his early years, Said makes plain the privileged nature of his upbringing (even if he does this unconsciously): "Our family home was in Talbiyah, a part of West Jerusalem that was sparsely inhabited but had been built and lived in exclusively by Palestinian Christians like us: the house was an imposing two-story stone villa with lots of rooms and a handsome garden in which my two youngest cousins, my sisters, and I would play." See Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage, 2000) 21.

<sup>17</sup> Kramer 27-28.

<sup>18</sup> Kramer 29.

<sup>19</sup> "Post-colonialism . . . deals with the effect of colonization on cultures and societies. As originally used by historians after the Second World War in terms such as *the post-colonial state*, "post-colonial" had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization." See, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: the Key Concepts* (New York:

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Routledge, 2000) 186.

<sup>20</sup> Kramer 31.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Scott McLemee, "What Said Said", *Inside Higher Education*, 13 December, 2006 <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/10/143.html>.

<sup>23</sup> McLemee, "What Said Said".

<sup>24</sup> Maya Jasanoff, "Before and After Said", *London Review of Books*, 8 June, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> These ideas of Foucault's are mostly worked out in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1973), *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1977), and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Press, 1977). Mary Louise Pratt also seems to have been influenced by Foucault. In *Imperial Eyes*, she speaks of "Redundancy, discontinuity, and unreality. These are some of the chief coordinates of the text of Euroimperialism, the stuff of its power to constitute the everyday with neutrality, spontaneity, numbing repetition" (2). This seems very close to the project outlined by Foucault in his *Archaeology of Knowledge* where he insists traditional history has concentrated on great events to the exclusion of the myriad personal histories which would give a very different view of the past.

<sup>26</sup> In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein rejected his earlier idea that language and reality shared a common logic. Instead, he propounded the view that reality and language is made up of many different logics. For example, he gives the story of the young boy who takes a shopping list from his mother to the local store. When the shopkeeper reads the note it says: "Three red apples". In order to fulfill this simple order, the shopkeeper must know what an apple is, be able to distinguish the colour red from all other colours and, finally, be able to count. The point is, that even in such a simple sentence, three different kinds of logic are being employed.

<sup>27</sup> *Orientalism* 272.

<sup>28</sup> Robert J. C. Young, "Foucault on Race and Colonialism", 13 Mar.2008. <<http://robertjcyoung.com/Foucault.pdf>> In this essay, Young also berates Foucault for his Franco-Centric view of the world.

<sup>29</sup> See "Interviews with Albert Hourani" in Nancy Elizabeth Gallagher, *Approaches to the History of the Middle East* (London: Ithaca Press, 1994) 40-41. Aijaz Ahmed, like Hourani, thought "that when the dust of current literary debates settles, Said's most enduring contribution will be seen as residing neither in *Orientalism*, which is a deeply flawed book, nor in the literary essays that have followed in its wake, but in his work on

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the Palestine issue". See Ahmad, *Orientalism and After*, 160-161.

<sup>30</sup> Irfan Habib, "Critical Notes on Edward Said", *International Socialism: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory*, 17 October, 2005: 130.

<sup>31</sup> Habib 134.

<sup>32</sup> Habib 134.

<sup>33</sup> Habib 135.

<sup>34</sup> Habib 130.

<sup>35</sup> See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*: "One of my favorites in the monarch-of-all-I-survey genre comes from Richard Burton's *Lake Regions of Central Africa*, which appeared in 1860 and achieved considerable renown in that prolific and highly competitive era of travel writing. Here in a descriptive *tour de force* Burton renders the dramatic moment of his discovery of Lake Tanganyika" (201). Pratt reasonably points out that "the 'discovery' of sites like Lake Tanganyika involved making one's way to the region and asking the local inhabitants if they knew of any big lakes, etc. in the area, then hiring them to take you there, whereupon, with their guidance and support, you proceeded to discover what they already knew" (201). However, why single out Burton for particular censure or ridicule? Burton was able to discover things for himself much more successfully than other explorers of the period such as Stanley and Speke, due to his mastery of local languages and interest in history, geography, ethnography and anthropology.

<sup>36</sup> David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration (Post-Contemporary Interventions)* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993) 18. "Pratt in her analysis of a passage in Burton's *The Lake Regions of Central Africa* (1860) identifies three parts of this rhetorical convention: the landscape is first aestheticized, then it is invested with a density of meaning intended to convey its material and symbolic richness, and finally it is described so as to subordinate it to the power of the speaker" (18).

<sup>37</sup> *Orientalism* 196.

<sup>38</sup> Dane Kennedy, *The Highly Civilized Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) 4.

<sup>39</sup> Kennedy 83-84.

<sup>40</sup> Kennedy 9.

<sup>41</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859). Darwin delayed publishing his conclusions for many years due to his fears concerning how they would be received. See Janet Brown, *Darwin's Origin of Species: A Biography (Books That Changed the World)* (London: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007) 50.

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<sup>42</sup> Frank Baker (Richard Burton), *Stone Talk: Marvellous Sayings of a Petral Portion of Fleet Street*, London, (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1865), "By freak of matter Adam burst/Through Simian womb!" (20).

<sup>43</sup> Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (London: John Murray, 1871). Of particular importance was Tylor's insistence that the human brain was essentially the same in all races.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler vol. 2, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Tyler, Preface to the Second edition.

<sup>46</sup> Isabel Burton, *The Life of Richard Burton* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893).

<sup>47</sup> Isabel Burton. Vol. II 447

<sup>48</sup> Isabel Burton. Vol. II 447-448.

<sup>49</sup> "The Life of Captain Sir Richard F. Burton. By His Wife." *The Edinburgh Review* July-Oct 1893: 439.

<sup>50</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, *The Devil Drives* (New York: Norton, 1984) 330.

<sup>51</sup> Kennedy 259.

<sup>52</sup> See bibliography for an extensive list of Burton biographies.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Wright, *The Life of Richard Burton* (London: Everett & Co., 1906) xii. "When I compared the two translations, page by page, I could scarcely believe my own eyes; and only one conclusion was possible. Burton, indeed, has taken from Payne at least three-quarters of the entire work. He has transferred many hundreds of sentences and clauses bodily. Sometimes, we come upon a whole page with only a word or two altered. In short, amazing to say, the public have given Burton credit for a gift which he did not possess--that of being a great translator." Robert Irwin has cast doubt on Wright's assertion concerning Burton's reliance on the Payne translation, explaining likenesses by the similar literary tastes shared by the two men. See Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004) 18.

<sup>54</sup> Kennedy 261-263.

<sup>55</sup> Kennedy 263-264.

<sup>56</sup> Kennedy 266-267.

<sup>57</sup> For example, see the Obscene Publications Act, 1959. This attempted to create a balance between the protection of real literature and the prosecution of pornography. Clause 4 argues: "...a person shall not be convicted of an offence against section two of this Act, and an order for forfeiture shall not be made under the foregoing section, if it is proved that publication of the article in question is justified as being for the public good

on the ground that it is in the interests of science, literature, art or learning, or of other objects of general concern.” See the “Obscene Publications Act 1959 (c.66)”, Ministry of Justice, HMSO.

<sup>58</sup> In 2008, a new biography of Burton was published by Jon R. Godsall. This work comes highly recommended by Mary S. Lovell.

<sup>59</sup> Mary S. Lovell, *A Rage to Live: A Biography of Richard and Isabel Burton* (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>60</sup> Kennedy 278.

<sup>61</sup> Kennedy 131-163.

<sup>62</sup> *Orientalism* has given rise to a multitude of books both supportive and critical (and even has strongly influenced the creation of a literary theory: post-colonialism). One of the latest attacks on Said’s theories has come from a Muslim source, albeit an apostate one. Ibn Warraq’s wide-ranging critique is weakened by his clear preference for the West over the East and his apparent hatred for Islam. See Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism* (London: Prometheus Books, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Bhabha’s prose is often notoriously difficult to penetrate. In his most influential book, *The Location of Culture*, he seems to suggest that the West discourses about colonial peoples in binary terms and that the dominance of the first term in each binary opposition establishes the superior way in which the West regards other cultures. Examples of these binary oppositions would be: centre/margin, civilized/ savage, enlightened/ignorant. According to Bhabha, it is only through the linguistic disruption of these binary oppositions that a new and more egalitarian discourse between the West and its ex-colonies can take place by means of “hybridity” and “linguistic multi-vocality.” The most practical way for this “disruption” to happen is through the culturally subversive writings of erstwhile colonial peoples. Bhabha ends his argument in the following way: “The problem of progress is not simply an unveiling of human perfectibility, not simply the hermeneutic of progress. In the performance of human doing, through the veil, emerges a figure of cultural time where perfectibility is not ineluctably tied to the myth of progressivism.” See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994) 367. As well as his clear debt to Said in his view of colonialism as a “discourse”, it should also be clear that Bhabha’s ideas have been fundamentally shaped by French intellectuals such as Foucault, Lacan and, perhaps most importantly, the deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida who, in his most influential book, *Of Grammatology*, spoke of the ways in which a text might be deconstructed through a thorough understanding of its binary oppositions. See Jacques Derrida (translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), *Of Grammatology*



(Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> *Orientalism* 195-196.

<sup>65</sup> *Orientalism* 195-196.

<sup>66</sup> Of course, Darwinism (and its offshoots) is of particular importance in this regard.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **BURTON IN MAKKAH AND MEDINA: SUFI ASPIRANT OR IMPERIALIST SPY?**

Richard Burton's journey to Madinah and Makkah was undertaken at a time when such an adventure had practical usefulness. Much of Africa and Arabia was still unknown and it was ambitious and intrepid Victorian explorers like Burton, Speke, Livingstone and Stanley, who did much to help fill in the white stretches on world maps.<sup>1</sup> At the time of his pilgrimage, Burton was a vigorous young man of thirty two and on leave from the Indian army. Why did he undertake such a dangerous and unlikely excursion into what were still violent and unfriendly lands? It is true that he was not the first European to make the Muslim pilgrimage, even if in many ways, he was the most improbable. There was Ludovico Bartema in 1503, who had travelled from Rome. When captured in Aden he was thrown into a dungeon. However, luckily for Bartema, he obviously possessed his country's Latin charms and some Arabic women arranged his escape.<sup>2</sup> Burton was hardly a romantic Italian adventurer, being by character a rather staid and sober Victorian—at least on the surface. More recently, the illustrious Johann Ludwig Burckhardt, a Swiss, had completed the pilgrimage, before unfortunately dying in Egypt of dysentery in 1817.

It was Burckhardt who Burton most admired of his predecessors. He was aware that, as regarded descriptive detail, he could hardly better his precursor's accounts of Makkah and the Ka'aba. Burckhardt, in 1808 had set off for the East intending, after gaining enough experience, to penetrate to the heart of the Middle East. Calling himself Sheikh Ibrahim ibn Abdallah he travelled to Aleppo, where he devoted himself to the study of Arabic, Islam and Islamic Law.<sup>3</sup> In early 1815, Burckhardt made the pilgrimage to Makkah, though he was only able to stay in the Holy City for a week at that time. Later he returned and spent three months documenting the life and religious heritage of the city. Burton praised Burckhardt

by saying “Homage to the memory of the accurate Burckhardt.”<sup>4</sup> Most of the other European travelers to Makkah had been Turkish captives: prisoners who had “turned Turk”. There can be little doubt that, in his undertaking of the perilous mission, Burton was mostly measuring himself against the lofty stature of Burckhardt—and it is with this fact that we need to deal first. In the following discussion, I will first consider Burton’s pilgrimage in relation to Burckhardt’s exhaustive account of his earlier Hajj. Later, I will critique Said’s view of Burton as a mere imperialist adventurer in Arabian lands who was able to achieve so much in the East—including his pilgrimage—due to his understanding of the rules by which man lives his life in society. However, most attention will be given to Burton the man himself, in order to try and explore the ways in which he regarded his own actions at this critical time in his life.

Burckhardt and Burton were two very different types of men. While Burton rejoiced in his combination of intellectual acuity and martial prowess, Burckhardt was a sickly specimen, frequently ill or frightened of falling ill during his travels in the East. In spite of this disadvantage, Burckhardt produced a most accurate description of Makkah and the Ka’aba—one that was really hard to better.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Burton was able to give far more precise details about Medina, and particularly the cemetery of the Muslim saints at al-Baqiya, than Burckhardt. Interestingly, we get no idea of Burckhardt as a central protagonist in his account of the pilgrimage. He is a shadowy observer who rarely enters directly into the action of his story other than in the most cursory ways. This is not to say that Burckhardt was not in danger during his travels. However, unlike Burton, he is not inclined to emphasize the dangers he faced for dramatic effect. An example of this might be found by examining the two men’s description of the interior of the Ka’aba. Let us first look at Burckhardt’s account.

The Kaaba is opened only three times in the year: on the 20th of the month of Ramadhan, on the 15th of Zulkade, and on the 10th of Moharram (or Ashour, as the Arabs call it). The opening takes place one hour after sun-rise, when the steps are wheeled up to the gate of the building: as soon as they touch the wall, immense crowds rush upon them, and in a moment fill the whole interior of the Kaaba. The steps are lined by the eunuchs of the mosque, who endeavour in vain to keep order, and whose sticks fall heavy upon those who do not drop a fee into their hands; many of the crowd, however, are often unmercifully

crushed. In the interior every visitor is to pray eight rikats, or make sixteen prostrations; in every corner of it two rikats: but it may easily be conceived how these prayers are performed, and that while one is bowing down, another walks over him. After the prayers are finished, the visitor is to lean with extended arms against any part of the wall, with his face pressed against it, and thus to recite two pious ejaculations. Sobbing and moaning fill the room; and I thought I perceived most heartfelt emotions and sincere repentance in many of the visitors: the following, and other similar ejaculations, are heard, and many faces are bedewed with tears: "O God of the house, O God forgive me, and forgive my parents, and my children! O God, admit me into paradise! O God, deliver our necks from hell-fire, O thou God of the old house!" I could not stay longer than five minutes; the heat was so great that I almost fainted, and several persons were carried out with great difficulty, quite senseless.<sup>6</sup>

Burckhardt provides a very sober and objective account and, while he found the interior stifling and not a place to stay longer than five minutes, there is no sense of imminent danger of discovery here. Why should Burckhardt be suspected of being a Christian when so many of the Hajis couldn't even speak Arabic? In contrast to Burckhardt, Burton likes to put the emphasis on his own personal risk—and in the process to aggrandize his heroic project:

A crowd had gathered around the Ka'abah, and I had no wish to stand bareheaded and barefooted in the mid-day September sun. At the cry of 'Open a path for the Haji who would enter the House,' the gazers made way. Two stout Makkans, who stood below the door, raised me in their arms, while a third drew me from above into the building. At the entrance I was accosted by several officials, dark-looking Makkans, of whom the blackest and plainest was a youth of the Banu Shaybah family...He held in his hand the huge silver-gilt padlock of the Ka'abah, and presently taking his seat upon a kind of wooden press in the left corner of the hall, he officially enquired my name, nation and other particulars...I will not deny that, looking at the windowless walls, the officials at the door, and the crowd of excited fanatics below...My feelings were of the trapped-rat description...This did not, however, prevent my carefully observing the scene during our long prayers, and making a rough plan with a pencil upon my white Ihram. <sup>7</sup>

Burton is the hero of his own narrative and he doesn't usually allow us to forget it—even for a moment. Burckhardt, on the other hand, usually tries to distance himself and his actions from the scholarly points he wishes to make. One exception to this would be Burckhardt's extreme dislike, bordering on real hatred, for Egyptians and Turks. An example of this bad feeling is seen in the following passage on the Turks, Syrians and Egyptians:

For my own part, a long residence among Turks, Syrians, and Egyptians, justifies me in declaring that they are wholly deficient in virtue, honour, and justice; that they have little true piety, and still less charity or forbearance; and that honesty is only to be found in their paupers or idiots. Like the Athenians of old, a Turk may perhaps know what is right and praiseworthy, but he leaves the practice to others; though, with fine maxims on his lips, he endeavours to persuade himself that he acts as they direct. Thus he believes himself to be a good Muselman, because he does not omit the performance of certain prayers and ablutions, and frequently invokes the forgiveness of God.<sup>8</sup>

Burckhardt's xenophobia against "Turks, Syrians, and Egyptians" was (as we shall later see) matched and perhaps exceeded by Burton's fulminations against Indians.

It may reasonably be stated that the main differences between the accounts of Burton and Burckhardt's Hajj is, on the one hand, Burckhardt's greater objectivity in his account and, on the other, Burton's concern to portray himself as the hero of his narrative. Burton's Hajj added little new information to that already included in Burckhardt's account. However, Burton's *Pilgrimage* is a far more entertaining read than Burckhardt's rather dry and scholarly work. As I suggested earlier, the only place where Burton's account is more useful than Burckhardt's is at Medina, where the latter fell ill and filled up his narrative with a lot of second hand material. In particular, Burton is better on the cemetery of al-Baqiya than Burckhardt. Burckhardt himself says of his time in Medina:

My remarks on Medina are but scanty; with good health, I should have added to them but as this town is totally unknown to Europeans, they may contain some acceptable information. The plan of the town was made by me during the first days of my stay; and I can vouch for the correctness of its outlines; but I had not the same leisure to trace it in all its details, as I had that of Mekka.<sup>9</sup>

Burckhardt's description of the cemetery of the saints near Medina, al-Baqiya, is certainly far more circumscribed and generalized than Burton's memorable account:

On the day after the pilgrim has performed his first duties at the mosque and the tomb, he usually visits the burial ground of the town, in memory of the many saints who lie buried there... Considering the sanctity of the persons

whose bodies it contains, it is a very mean place... The Wahabys are accused of having defaced the tombs... but they would certainly not have annihilated every... simple tomb built of stone here, which they did neither at Mekka nor any other place. The miserable state of this cemetery must have existed prior to the Wahaby conquest, and is to be ascribed to the niggardly minds of the towns-people, who are little disposed to incur any expense in honouring the remains of their celebrated countrymen. 10

Something of the same carping spirit that earlier expressed contempt for “Turks, Syrians, and Egyptians” can here be discerned in Burckhardt’s condemnation of the “niggardly minds” of the Medina townspeople.

In contrast to Burckhardt, who gives hardly a page to the saints’ cemetery at al-Baqiya, Burton devotes an entire chapter of his *Pilgrimage* to his visit. After a long discourse on the history of the cemetery and its restoration since Burckhardt’s day by the Turkish Sultans, Abd al-Hamid and Mahmud, Burton gives a precise and accurate eye-witness account of his own trip to the cemetery.

I entered the holy cemetery right foot forwards, as if it were a mosque, and barefooted, to avoid suspicion of being a heretic. For though the citizens wear their shoes in the Bakia, they are much offended at seeing the Persians follow their example. We began by the general benediction; ‘Peace be upon Ye, O people of Al-Bakiya! Peace be upon Ye, O Admitted to the Presence of the Most High! Receive Ye what Ye have been promised!...’ After which we recited the Chapter Al-Ikhlās and the Testification, then raised our hands, mumbled the Fatihah, passed our palms down our faces, and went on.<sup>11</sup>

Burton’s account continues in this same minute way as he visits the places of holy interest including the mausoleum of the Caliph Usman, the tomb of Mohammed’s wet nurse, the final resting places of the Martyrs of Al-Bakiya and the tomb of Mohammed’s young son, Ibrahim:

The fifth station is near the centre of the cemetery at the tomb of Ibrahim, who died, to the eternal regret of Al-Islam, some say six months old, others in his second year. He was the son of Mariyah, the Coptic girl, sent as a present to Muhammad by Jarihi, the Mukaukas, or governor of Alexandria. The Prophet with his own hand piled earth upon the grave, and sprinkled it with water,--a ceremony then first performed,--disposed small stones upon it, and pronounced the final salutation. For which reason many holy men were buried in this part of the cemetery, everyone being ambitious to lie in ground which has been honored by the Apostle’s hands.<sup>12</sup>

There is clearly a sense, in passages such as these, of Burton being emotionally involved in the retelling of Muslim stories and history. Burckhardt, in contrast, keeps his own sympathies very much to himself.

In general terms, Burton did not—and could not really hope to—add a lot that was new to Burckhardt's earlier narrative and pilgrimage. What then was Burton's real motive in performing the Pilgrimage? We might reasonably believe that the young Burton went partly in search of adventure and fame. Burckhardt's account of his travels was not widely known to the common man and, after all, he had not been English. In addition, as we have seen, Burton shaped his narrative as a heroic deception in the interests of colonialism and the Empire. The change in perspective made all the difference in the world and meant that Burton's account would become fabled in Britain, while Burckhardt's foreign narrative (even though he wrote in English) would be largely ignored. Was then Burton a mere adventurer acting on behalf of British imperialism and acquiring a major fame in the process? This would indeed seem to approximate to Said's view of Burton. However, before we look at Said's position in more detail, we should first ask ourselves whether Burton might possibly have had a deeper and more profound reason for embarking on the Hajj than mere personal glory, the Empire and the addition of a few glosses to Burckhardt's scholarly work.

In his 1990 biography of Burton, Edward Rice makes the assertion that Burton had become a Sufi Muslim while an army officer in India and, in consequence, his pilgrimage was necessary to his spiritual welfare and perfectly in order:

Burton's claim to an advanced rank as a Sufi must not be taken too seriously. The average Englishman had no idea what a Sufi was, and 'Master' sounds better than novice. What is important is that Burton was one of the first Westerners to convert to Islam and then to follow it deeper into a religious brotherhood. He certainly was the first European to write about Sufism, not as an academic but as a practicing Sufi. He gained a sufficient grasp of the inner knowledge, the Gnosticism he mentioned so often, to be able to preach in various mosques in Sind and Baluchistan...and later in Somalia. And he had realized a good part of that honored Muslim practice, the memorizing of the Qu'ran.<sup>13</sup>

Rice argues that in his essay, "El-Islam", started when he was a young man, but



never completed, Burton summarized the reasons for his acceptance of Islam and rejection of other religions, including Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity: all faiths that he had adhered to or flirted with at one time or another. In this essay, Burton asserts that Christianity has become corrupted over the centuries and suffers from having no set times for prayers, nor any insistence on ritual cleanliness. Furthermore, he abhors the Christian's tolerance for 'unclean' meats such as pork and rabbit and its tolerance, even more debilitating, for alcohol. He states that Christianity was ready for reform in the sixth century when Muhammed appeared on the scene. Rice asserts that from this time on, Burton could only praise Islam, 'for in short, from its dietary prescriptions to its highest moral, ethical, philosophical, and mystical beliefs he thought it was the only faith for man, guiding him through the perils of life.'<sup>14</sup> As Burton himself puts it in the aforementioned essay:

The world is the Muslim's prison, the tomb his stronghold, and Paradise his journey's end...To the Muslim, time is but a point in illimitable eternity, life is but a step from the womb to the tomb...He has no great secret to learn. The Valley of Death has no shadow for him; no darkness of uncertainty and doubt horrifies his fancy...As in Christianity s in El Islam, eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath fancy conceived the spiritual joys of those who in mundane life have qualified themselves for heavenly futurity.<sup>15</sup>

Is the equivalence of Christianity and Islam at the conclusion of this passage really the bridge from one religion to the other?

According to Rice, we cannot be sure how far Burton progressed in his studies of Sufism, but he advanced far enough to assert he had become a Master-Sufi.<sup>16</sup> Burton himself writes in the *Pilgrimage*:

A reverend man, whose name I do not care to quote, some time ago invited me into his order, the Kadiriya under the high-sounding name of Bismillah Shah, and after a due period of probation he graciously elevated me to the proud position of a Murshid, or Master of the mystic craft.<sup>17</sup>

Rice also claims that Burton took a full part in the Sufi's demanding spiritual exercises:

One of Burton's favorite practices was the sacred dance, the sama, in the tauhid- khanah, where, after praying silently for half an hour, seated in a circle on sheepskins on the floor, swaying in rhythm to the dhikr, the dervishes would begin the first movements of the dance and then, on their feet, enter the majestic cadences...They chant Allahu Akhbar—"God is Great"—and the Fatihah until they reach the stage of halat, ecstasy. At this point two dervishes would take cutlasses down from the niches in the walls and heat them red hot and present them to the Shaykh. Breathing over them in prayer, the shaykh would impart the mystical presence of Abdul-Qadir Gilani and return them to the dervishes.<sup>18</sup>

At this point in proceedings, the dervishes in an ecstatic state would take hold of the red hot cutlasses, apply them to various parts of the body and inflict wounds upon themselves, apparently without any sensation of pain or discomfiture. Rice goes on to tell us that:

When Burton's body was prepared for burial after his death in 1890, it was found to be covered with scars, the wounds of innumerable swords, which have never been explained...What seems likely is that Burton, in engaging in the sama with the other dervishes, did not hesitate to enter fully into the ritual of the swords, suffering cuts on his torso and limbs with the same abandon as the other dervishes.<sup>19</sup>

This report of body scarring is evidently conclusive proof, for Rice, of Burton's conversion to Islam.

In the early eighteen fifties, while in England and France, Burton began to dwell seriously on the possibility of making a journey to Madina and Makkah. Ostensibly, there were good practical reasons for this, including the mapping and exploration of the famous "Empty Quarter" of Arabia, ethnographical studies of the local people, and the possible opening up of a market for horses between Arabia and India. However, Rice suggests that Burton was directed by personal motives as well:

Burton had some personal reasons, too, one the question of nerve, which he mentioned after his return. He wanted to 'prove, by trial that what might be perilous to other travelers was safe to me.' And underlying all the other reasons was the matter of his Muslim duty.<sup>20</sup>

This then, is the story as far as Rice sees it. Burton was fulfilling his Muslim

duty by going on Hajj and was by no means indulging in anything that might be interpreted as duplicitous or self-serving behavior: "He was a Muslim, and it was both his Muslim duty and his Muslim privilege to go to Mecca."<sup>21</sup>

This perspective is, of course, very different from that of Said who saw Burton as a kind of highly intelligent outcast figure, or adventurer, determined to make his name and fortune as an agent of empire in the Middle East and elsewhere. Said notes in Richard Burton's writings "the struggle between individualism and a strong feeling of national identification with Europe (specifically England) as an imperial power in the East."<sup>22</sup>

According to Said, 'Burton thought of himself both as a rebel against authority...and as a potential agent of authority in the East.'<sup>23</sup> As a result, unlike Rice, Said sees Burton as continually playing a role in the East. His knowledge of Islam and Islamic customs--and even his great journeys in Islamic lands--representing nothing more than an exercise in the practice of "the degree to which human life in society was governed by rules and codes."<sup>24</sup>

For Said, Burton is a highly ingenious interpreter of the codes and rules by which societies work. Far from performing the pilgrimage as a Muslim duty, Burton is actually, in his accomplishment of this task, asserting his complete understanding of the rules and codes specific to Muslim society and also his superiority over them. Said draws attention not only to Burton's self-dramatization, but also to his actions' political implications:

For even in Burton's prose we are never directly *given* the Orient; everything about it is presented to us by way of Burton's knowledgeable (and often prurient) interventions, which remind us repeatedly how he had taken over the management of Oriental life for the purpose of his narrative. And it is this fact—for in the *Pilgrimage* it is a fact—that elevates Burton's consciousness to a position of supremacy over the Orient. In that position his individuality perforce encounters, and indeed merges with, the voice of Empire, which is itself a system of rules, codes, and concrete epistemological habits. Thus when Burton tells us in the *Pilgrimage* that "Egypt is a treasure to be won," that it "is the most tempting prize which the East holds out to the ambition of Europe, not excepted even the Golden Horn," we must recognize how the voice of the highly idiosyncratic master of Oriental knowledge informs, feeds into the voice of European ambition for rule over the Orient.<sup>25</sup>

For Said, Burton's knowledge of the codes and system of rules governing Islam are merely the necessary prerequisites for the completion of his main task: that of serving the Empire and, in the process, advancing his own material and social position. According to this perspective, Burton is able to successfully copy any system of rules for the purpose of his own advantage. This is a profoundly different point of view to that of Rice and we need to ask in the light of Said's remarks whether Rice is able to give any concrete evidence for his assertion that Burton was a Muslim at the time of the *Pilgrimage*.

Rice does not point to any one conclusive statement or action by Burton to support his contention that the famous travel writer thought of himself as a Muslim, but it is an assumption that permeates his biography. However, such an assumption leaves many unanswered questions. Reading Burton's own account of his pilgrimage, we will come up against many sections where it is clear that he sees himself as a traveler in disguise, a Christian in foreign lands. I intend to look at these parts of the *Pilgrimage* in some detail, but first I want to consider whether there were any good reasons why Burton might deny being a Muslim (or wish to conceal the fact that he was a Muslim).

Islam was poorly understood by the Europe of Burton's day, and the idea of a civilized white man willingly converting would have been inexplicable to the vast majority of its citizens. Certainly, more than a little opprobrium would attach to the name of a gentleman and British Officer who had, without any force being used, "turned Turk". On the other hand, it was only necessary to dissemble his real motives in order to appear in an entirely different light. As a fearless explorer in an age of exploration, he would be seen as a hero, a master of disguise and foreign languages who by pluck and determination had been able to penetrate to the very heart of the Muslims' inner sanctum and come home safely. Seen from this point of view, Burton had pulled the Turk's beard and returned home to tell the tale. At this stage of the argument, a moral objection suggests itself. If Burton were truly a Muslim, wouldn't he hesitate to lie and deceive concerning his own true beliefs? Wasn't the pit of Hell and eternal damnation awaiting for any Muslim who betrayed his own religion for a temporary reward in this world?

Rice deals with this objection by reference to the Isma'ili practice of 'taqiya'.

While in Sind, according to Rice, ‘Burton became absorbed in Isma’ili doctrines.’ Rice goes on to claim that Burton “could now see a relation to some of the Kabbalistic beliefs he had come across at Oxford, especially in the mystical use of numbers.” Exactly how Rice knows this is not clear.<sup>26</sup> Regarding the Ismaili’s practice of ‘taqiya’ Rice tells us:

To survive reprisals and to avoid detection among orthodox Muslims, the Isma’ilis and other extremist sects had developed the practice of ‘taqiya’, dissimulation or concealment of belief. Under the Sunni princes, their enemies, the Shi’as, could be forced under pain of death to denounce Ali and the Imams. The hiding of one’s true beliefs by taqiya came to be not only a matter of survival but of religious ordinance. The tenth century Shi’a divine, Ibn Babuya al-Saduq, stated, ‘Our belief concerning taqiya is that it is obligatory...’<sup>27</sup>

Accordingly, Rice then argues:

Taqiya seems to have been adopted by Burton as a sensible practice—naturally he could not admit to taqiya—and the result is that often his feelings about the faith of Islam are obscure, though never negative: questioners were not likely to get a clear answer from him, and in print he was very circumspect...<sup>28</sup>

In other words, if Rice is correct, Burton was under no moral imperative to make others aware of his Isma’ili faith. In fact, it was perfectly in order and even desirable for him to dissemble about his true beliefs.

On the other hand, this contradictory form of deceit left him open to a different form of criticism: that of basic dishonesty. One vociferous critic was Francis Palgrave, who himself made a trip to Arabia in 1865. Palgrave cast serious doubts on Burton’s ethics and integrity.

To feign a religion which the adventurer himself does not believe, to perform with scrupulous exactitude, as of the highest and holiest import, practices which he inwardly ridicules, and which he intends on his return to hold up to the ridicule of others, to turn for weeks and months together the most sacred and awful bearings of man towards his Creator into a deliberate and truthless mummery, not to mention other and darker touches—all this seems hardly compatible with the character of a European gentleman, let alone that of a Christian.<sup>29</sup>

Burton was particularly sensitive to the allegation that he had made a laughing stock of Islam. In his defense, he wrote passionately of his deep regard for the foreign faith.

The fact is...Al-Islam, in its capital tenets, approaches much nearer to the faith of Jesus than do the Pauline and Athenasian modifications which, in this our day, have divided the Indo-European mind into Catholic and Roman, Greek and Russian, Lutheran and Anglican...The Moslem may be more tolerant, more enlightened, more charitable, than many societies of self-styled Christians.<sup>30</sup>

Again, Burton takes pains to associate Islam with Christianity--indeed to present Islam as a kind of reformed version of Christianity.

We return then to the central dilemma. Was Burton a Sufi Muslim, practicing the devotion of 'taqiya' in his trip to Makkah and Madinah, or was he a Christian or agnostic, interested only in self-aggrandizement and the promotion of the imperialist mission? There are certainly many parts of Burton's *Pilgrimage*, which could be used to support either contention and perhaps by examining some of them, we might come to some resolution.

Burton's first view of the Ka'abah, though obviously filled with deep significance, would seem to support the belief that he was merely a wily traveler of another faith, deceiving the 'Infidel' in the very heart of his own domain.

There at last it lay, the bourn of my long and weary Pilgrimage, realising the plans and hopes of many and many a year. The mirage medium of Fancy invested the huge catafalque and its gloomy pall with peculiar charms. There were no giant fragments of hoar antiquity as in Egypt, no remains of graceful and harmonious beauty as in Greece and Italy, no barbarous gorgeousness as in the buildings of India; yet the view was strange, unique—and how few have looked upon the celebrated shrine! I may truly say that, of all the worshippers who clung weeping to the curtain, or who pressed their beating hearts to the stone, none felt for the moment a deeper emotion than did the Haji from the far-north. It was as if the poetical legends of the Arab spoke truth, and that the waving wings of angels, not the sweet breeze of morning, were agitating and swelling the black covering of the shrine. But to confess humbling truth, theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride.<sup>31</sup>

When Burton rhetorically states "and how few have looked upon the celebrated

shrine!” it is clear that he means how few Europeans, or non-Muslims. Furthermore, the passage is actually a rather beautiful description of the traveler reaching his journey’s end: is it likely that Burton could conceal his true feelings at such a moment of high emotion? In the last sentence of the passage, Burton makes it clear that he is presenting himself as an outsider who, by stealth, knowledge and intelligence, has penetrated to the very beating heart of an alien faith. This is to say, that he is undoubtedly trying to take the credit for having performed a remarkably difficult and dangerous task, while also criticizing himself for the gratification of pride where others are experiencing high religious feelings. Should we then take these words at face value? Or is the secret Sufi Muslim deceiving us by his masterly use of ‘taqiya’? Is that final sentence a cover for his own sense of spiritual exaltation? There can be no definitive answer to this. All that can be said, is that this seems to be a remarkably heart-felt passage. Perhaps the truth could be that there is confusion in Burton’s own mind. At this moment, he wishes to be everything to all men: the good and respectable Muslim to his fellow travelers and the bold and dynamic adventurer and scholar to his own compatriots. Is it possible, as Rice argues, that in his own mind, these contradictions were cursorily resolved by obeisance to the secretive practice of ‘taqiya’?

Later, when Burton is able to enter the interior of the Ka’aba he describes his feelings as being of the ‘trapped rat’ variety.<sup>32</sup> Perhaps it is not necessary to doubt Burton’s sincerity at this point. After all, he was an Englishman pretending to be an Indian with Afghan parents and, whatever his real allegiance might have been, it is likely that the people of Makkah would have given him short shrift, if his true origins had become known. However, there can also be little doubt that Burton is, at least to some extent, playing up to his readership here. A little later, when Burton is talking with Abdullah, the brother of Muhammed, the subject of the English people comes up:

His curiosity about the English in India was great, and I satisfied it by praising, as a Muslim would, their *politique*, their even-handed justice, and their good star.<sup>33</sup>

After then commenting on a fable, common in Arabia at the time, about the English almost accepting the new religion of Islam at the end of the Prophet's life,<sup>34</sup> Burton states his belief that at some future point in time, the English may need to take Makkah under its protecting arm.

It requires not the ken of a prophet to foresee the day when political necessity.....will compel us (i.e. *Britain*) to occupy in force the fountain-head of Al-Islam.<sup>35</sup>

Is the secret Muslim here merely saying something that might erase all suspicion of a clandestine conversion? Or is the viewpoint faithfully held: in this case suggesting that Burton was, as Said suggests, more a colonialist Englishman of his time, than the Sufi Muslim Rice would have us believe in?

The answer to this question is likely to prove rather complicated. Certainly, Burton was a man of his time and there is nothing in his writings to suggest that he considered British colonial rule as anything other than beneficial to the world (a point of view that seemed to become more pronounced as he got older and became more relativist in his thinking). A British protectorate over Makkah might, in his opinion, have been the best assurance of stability and peace in the region, not only for Christians, but for Muslims too. We should not forget that the Wahhabi puritans from Nejd province had laid waste to many of the graves at Al Baqiya cemetery in Madinah, not so many years before Burton's own pilgrimage.<sup>36</sup> A British protectorate probably would, in Burton's opinion, at least prevent any future repeat of such wanton destruction of Holy places and relics.

There are many sections in the *Pilgrimage*, where Burton's English roots appear to run very deep. For example, he often seems to believe in the racial superiority of European peoples over their Asian counterparts. In chapter two of the *Pilgrimage*, when Burton is about to leave Alexandria, he turns down the services of an Egyptian guide, citing what would probably today be considered pseudo-scientific, phrenological reasons in defense of his decision.

[M]y 'brother' had shifting eyes (symptoms of fickleness), close together (indices of cunning); a flat crowned head, and large ill-fitting lips; signs which led me to think lightly of his honesty, firmness, and courage.



Phrenology and physiognomy, be it observed, disappoint you often amongst civilized people, the proper action of whose brain upon the features is impeded by the external pressure of education, accident, example, habit, and necessity. But they are tolerably safe guides when groping your way through the mind of man in his so-called natural state, a being of impulse, in that chrysalis condition of mental development which is rather instinct than reason.<sup>37</sup>

A little further on in the same chapter, Burton ironically bemoans the fact that Egypt is becoming ‘civilized’:

If you order your peasant to be flogged, his friends gather in threatening hundreds at your gates; when you curse your boatman, he complains to your consul; the dragomans afflict you with strange wild notions about honesty; a Government order prevents you from using vituperative language to the ‘natives’ in general; and the very donkey boys are becoming cognizant of the right of man to remain unbastinadoed.<sup>38</sup>

This is surely the superior voice of a nineteenth-century British imperialist and it doesn’t seem to sit easily with the concept of Burton as a secret Muslim.

On the Nile steamboat, nicknamed the ‘Little Asthmatic’, during his long journey to Cairo, Burton watches the embarkation of an Indian traveler with the haughty superiority of a true British imperialist.

His sooty complexion, lank black hair, features in which appeared *beaucoup de finesse*, that is to say, abundant rascality, an eternal smile and treacherous eyes, his gold ring, dress of showy colours, fleshy stomach, fat legs, round back, and a peculiar manner of frowning and fawning simultaneously, marked him an Indian.<sup>39</sup>

Burton expands on his views of Indians later in the same chapter and his expressed opinions would appear to be exactly in line with those of a conservative English gentleman of the period--perhaps even more strongly negative than those of most. Moreover, many of the strictures expressed about Indians, would appear to extend to ‘oriental’ peoples in general—a collective noun that Burton used far more freely than scholars would today.<sup>40</sup>

But of all Orientals, the most antipathetical companion to an Englishman

is, I believe, an East Indian. Like the fox in the fable, fulsomely flattering at first, he gradually becomes easily friendly, disagreeably familiar, offensively rude, which ends by rousing the 'spirit of the British lion.' Nothing delights the Hindi so much as an opportunity of safely venting the spleen with which he regards his victors. He will sit in the presence of a magistrate, or an officer, the very picture of cringing submissiveness. But after leaving the room, he is as different from his former self as a counsel in court from a counsel at a concert, a sea captain at a club dinner from a sea captain on his quarter-deck. Then he will discover that the English are not brave, nor clever, nor generous, nor civilized, nor anything but surpassing rogues; that every official takes bribes, that their manners are utterly offensive, and that they are rank infidels.<sup>41</sup>

A couple of paragraphs further on, Burton turns his attention to the manners and mores of 'Orientals' in general.

Woe to the unhappy Englishman...who must serve an Eastern lord. Worst of all, if the master be an Indian, who, hating all Europeans, adds an especial spite to Oriental coarseness, treachery and tyranny. Even the experiment of associating with them is almost too hard to bear. But a useful deduction may be drawn from such observations; and as few have had greater experience than myself, I venture to express my opinion with confidence, however unpopular or unfashionable it may be.<sup>42</sup>

Racist definitions of entire peoples are by no means uncommon in the *Pilgrimage*. One pilgrim is as 'coldly supercilious as a Turk, and energetically avaricious as an Arab.'<sup>43</sup> A servant is 'the pure African, noisily merry at one moment, at another silently sulky; affectionate and abusive, brave and boastful, reckless and crafty, exceedingly quarrelsome, and unscrupulous to the last degree.'<sup>44</sup> Such simplistic definitions, certainly show us clearly that Burton's essential views on many important matters such as ethnicity and racial distinctions were the same as those of the majority of Englishmen of the time. It is hard to square such racist attitudes with Rice's belief that Burton had converted to Islam.

There is also the question of Burton's liking for alcohol to be considered. Throughout his pilgrimage, it seems that he carried some whisky in a small bottle. In addition, during his sojourn in Cairo his 'departure was hastened by an accident.'<sup>45</sup> This "accident" was more an act of foolishness based on the love of alcohol and the state it induces. In the Caravanserai, in Cairo, Burton meets

Yuzbashi, the Albanian Irregular (a Muslim who, like Burton, was on his way to perform Hajj) who invites Burton to drink with him.

About nine o'clock, when the Caravanserai is quiet, Burton takes a pipe and a tobacco pouch, sticks his dagger in his belt, and slips into Ali Agha's room... The 'materials' peep out of an iron pot filled with water; one is a long, thin, flask of 'Araki, the other a bottle of strong perfume. Burton writes:

Ali Agha welcomed me politely, and seeing me admire the preparations, bade me beware how I suspected an Albanian of not knowing how to drink... Taking up a little tumbler, in shape like those from which French postilions used to drink *la goutte*, he inspected it narrowly, wiped out the interior with his forefinger, filled it to the brim, and offered it to his guest with a bow. I received it with a low salam, swallowed its contents at once, turned it upside down in proof of fair play, replaced it upon the floor, with a jaunty movement of the arm, somewhat like a 'pugilist' delivering a 'rounder', bowed again, and requested him to help himself.<sup>46</sup>

The two men get thoroughly drunk and decide to bring Burton's friend Haji Wali to the scene of the drinking bout. He is successfully summoned, but refuses to drink. At this point, the Albanian decides that he wants to bring a group of dancing girls to the entertainment and reels out of the room, Burton following and remonstrating in his wake. The drunken Albanian stumbles into private rooms and later assaults an Egyptian on the stairs. The next morning the captain of the Albanian Irregulars and the Indian doctor (Burton) are the talk of the Caravanserai and Burton arranges to make a hasty departure. He concludes: "Thus it was, gentle reader, that I lost my reputation of being a 'serious person' at Cairo. And all I have to show for it is the personal experience of an Albanian drinking bout."<sup>47</sup>

Would a secret convert to Islam continue drinking alcohol with the level of fervor and indifference for religious strictures that Burton demonstrates here? Of course, it is true that Burton refers to drinking as 'being considered by Muslims a funny and pleasant sort of sin.'<sup>48</sup> However, new converts would perhaps be unlikely to hold a major stricture of the Islamic religion in such scant regard. Furthermore, it would appear that Burton was a fairly heavy drinker right through his whole life, regarding it as a manly pursuit. Would this have been likely, if Burton had indeed been a sincere convert to Islam?

There are also passages in Burton's *Pilgrimage* where he makes reference to Christianity in an inclusive way, apparently including himself in the loose collective noun. For example, in the notes to Chapter Sixteen, 'A Visit to the Prophet's Tomb', Burton refers directly to the Muslim belief in the survival of Jesus on the cross in fairly disparaging terms:

It is almost unnecessary to inform the reader that all Muslims deny the personal suffering of Christ, cleaving to the heresy of the Christian Docetes—certain 'beasts in the shape of men', as they are called in the Epistles of Ignatius to the Smyrnians—who believed that a phantom was crucified in our Saviour's place. They also hold to the second coming of the Lord, in the flesh, as a forerunner to Muhammed, who shall reappear shortly before the day of judgement.<sup>49</sup>

If this is Burton indulging in the Sufi Muslim practice of 'taqiya', then it seems to come perilously close to willful falsification for its own sake. There would appear to be no overriding reason for Burton to supply this information, nor to so obviously include himself in that reference to 'our Saviour.' Whatever, his true allegiance may be, it is clear that Burton is, at least outwardly, affirming his allegiance as a Christian in such passages as these.

Acting as a counter balance to these sections in the *Pilgrimage*, however, are those where Burton appears to praise and approximate to the Islamic religion far more closely than might be expected from an English Orientalist and scholar. These passages are of the type that might be explained by a fervor for impartial observation but, in their collectivity, they suggest a friendliness towards and a kinship with Islam that was certainly unusual for an English gentleman of the time. Of this type would be Burton's citation on the Muslim's attitude towards slavery, a subject which in little more than ten years, was to bring a terrible war to the North American continent.

The laws of Muhammed enjoin his followers to treat slaves with the greatest mildness, and the Muslims are in general scrupulous observers of the Apostle's recommendation. Slaves are considered members of the family, and in houses where free servants are also kept, they seldom do any other work than filling the pipes, presenting the coffee, accompanying their master when going out, rubbing his feet when he takes a nap in the afternoon, and driving away the flies from him. When a slave is not satisfied, he can legally compel

his master to sell him. He has no care for food, lodging, clothes and washing, and has no taxes to pay; he is exempt from military service and soccage, and in spite of his bondage is freer than the freest Fellah in Egypt.<sup>50</sup>

In a passage such as this, Burton seems very much at home with the idea of personal responsibility to both God and man. This personal dimension might be usefully contrasted with what he probably regarded as his more public responsibilities.

Burton, at times, appears to give the Arab, and the Badawi in particular, an almost mythical simplicity and righteousness, obviously considered in contrast to a laxity in the morals of so called 'civilized' peoples. Near the Al Hamra fort, on the way from Yambu to Bir Abbas, the boy Muhammed cheats his fellow travelers of the head of a sheep with which they had wanted to make 'haggis'. An argument develops, which Burton is able to calm by reference to the fact that Muhammed is a stranger in their country:

With the 'Demon's' voluble tongue and impudent countenance in the van, they opened such a volley of raillery and sarcasm upon the young 'tripe seller', that he in his turn became excited—furious. I had some difficulty to keep the peace, for it did not suit my interests that they should quarrel. But to do the Arabs justice, nothing is easier for a man who knows them than to work upon their good feelings. 'He is a stranger in your country—a guest!' acted as a charm; they listened patiently to Muhammed's gross abuse, only promising to answer him when in *his* land, that is to say, near Makkah...<sup>51</sup>

Once again, Burton might be seen here as going beyond the neutrality of the academic observer. It is clear that he *admires* the Arabs for their simple but just morality and values. It is also worth considering Burton's words to the effect that a man who knows the Arabs can easily appeal to their better nature. Burton himself was such a man and it is perhaps pertinent to ask how he could have become so close to the Arabs without having embraced their traditions and religion.

On the entry into Madinah, Burton's caravan is met by a bustling throng of relations and friends—and once more, Burton feels the compulsion to comment on the kind and affectionate nature of the people:

Truly the Arabs show more heart on these occasions than any Oriental

people I know; they are of a more affectionate nature than the Persians, and their manners are far more demonstrative than those of the Indians...The general mode of saluting was to throw one arm over the shoulder and the other round the side, placing the chin first upon the left and then upon the right collar bone, and rapidly shifting till a 'jam satis' suggested itself to both parties.<sup>52</sup>

Another passage from the notes to the same chapter, shows the Arab again from a perspective that suggests an understanding or even empathy with their inwardness:

The Arabs, who suffer greatly from melancholia, are kind to people afflicted with this complaint; it is supposed to cause a distaste for society, and a longing for solitude, an unsettled habit of mind, and a neglect of worldly affairs...I have remarked that in Arabia students are subject to it, and that amongst their philosophers and literary men, there is scarcely an individual who was not spoken of as a 'Saudawi'.....My friend Omar Effendi used to complain, that at times his temperament drove him out of the house,--so much did he dislike the sound of the human voice,--to pass the day seated upon some eminence in the vicinity of the city.<sup>53</sup>

Once again, Burton the man, seems to be drawn to the sensitive personality of the Arabs.

When Burton reaches Madinah, many of his observations appear to convey the certainty of a 'true believer' rather than the aloof intellectual approach of the academic traveler. Thus, in speaking of the Prophet's Mosque and the way the Prophet would spend his days there, Burton's prose becomes almost reverential:

In this Mosque Muhammed spent the greater part of the day with his companions, conversing, instructing, and comforting the poor. Hard by were the abodes of his wives, his family, and his principal friends. Here, he prayed, at the call of the Azan, or devotion-cry, from the roof. Here he received worldly envoys and embassies, and the heavenly messages conveyed by the Archangel Gabriel. And within a few yards of the hallowed spot, he died, and found a grave.<sup>54</sup>

This is a very moving evocation and, one might say, utterly unlike the dry statement of fact and possibility that might have been made by an uninvolved observer (Burckhardt, for example). Are Burton's Islamic affiliations here, under

the pressure of his once in a lifetime trip, beginning to show beyond his usual practice of 'taqiya'?

While in Madinah, Burton takes time out to examine the character of the Madani—and much of what he says rings with admiration for these simple sons of the desert.

Added to this pride are indolence, and the true Arab prejudice, which even in the present day, prevents a Badawi from marrying the daughter of an artisan. Like Castilians, they consider labour humiliating to any but a slave; nor is this, as a clever French author remarks, by any means an unreasonable idea, since Heaven, to punish man for disobedience, caused him to eat daily bread by the sweat of his brow. Besides, there *is* degradation, moral and physical, in handiwork compared with the freedom of the desert. The loom and the file do not conserve courtesy and chivalry like the sword and spear; man 'extends his tongue,' to use an Arab phrase, when a cuff and not a stab is to be the consequence of an injurious expression. Even the ruffian becomes polite in California, where his brother ruffian carries his revolver, and those European nations who were most polished when every gentleman wore a rapier, have become the rudest since Civilization disarmed them.<sup>55</sup>

This is clearly a very personal statement and amounts to a virtual panegyric in favor of the warrior's noble and simple life. Burton was also anxious to protect the Arab Muslim from criticisms concerning his treatment of women and the practice of polygamy. In particular, he attends to the phenomenon of the harem, which intrigued Europeans:

Europe now knows that the Muslim husband provides separate apartments and a distinct establishment for each of his wives, unless, as sometimes happens, one be an old woman and the other a child. And confessing that envy, hatred, and malice often flourish in polygamy, the Muslim asks, Is monogamy open to no objections? As far as my limited observations go, polyandry is the only state of society in which jealousy and quarrels about the sex are the exception and not the rule of life...

In quality of doctor I have seen a little and heard much of the haram. It often resembles a European home composed of a man, his wife, and his mother. And I have seen in the West many a 'happy fireside' fitter to make Miss Martineau's heart ache than any haram in Grand Cairo...<sup>56</sup>

Burton even suggests that Arab chivalry rather than mediaeval Christianity has had a shaping impact on modern sexual relations:

Were it not evident that the spiritualizing of sexuality by sentiment, of propensity by imagination, is universal among the highest orders of mankind,--*c'est l'étoffe de la nature que l'imagination a brodée*, says Voltaire,--I should attribute the origin of 'love' to the influence of the Arabs' poetry and chivalry upon European ideas rather than to medieval Christianity. Certain 'fathers of the Church' it must be remembered, did not believe that women have souls. The Muslims never went so far.<sup>57</sup>

Under the guise of answering criticism against Islam, Burton here makes some comparisons and comes down clearly on the side of the Muslims. Westerners may criticize them for polygamy but, according to Burton, it actually creates fewer tensions between the sexes than monogamy. Furthermore, as Burton states, at least the Muslims never contended, as did some early Christians, that women never had souls.<sup>58</sup>

After concluding Hajj, Burton and his friends return to Makkah and repair to the Haram in order to hear the sermon. This is the occasion for another passage of high praise for Islam and Burton concludes it with the affirmation that despite having seen religious ceremonies of many faiths from all over the world, he has never seen anything as wonderful as this.

The vast quadrangle was crowded with worshippers sitting in long rows, and everywhere facing the central black tower: the showy colours of their dresses were not to be surpassed by a garden of the most brilliant flowers, and such diversity of detail would probably not be seen massed together in any other building upon earth. The women, a dull and somber-looking group, sat apart in their peculiar place. The Pasha stood on the roof of Zemzem, surrounded by guards in Nizam uniform...Nothing seemed to move but a few Darwayshes, who, censer in hand, sidled through the rows and received the unsolicited alms of the Faithful...Then the old man stood up and began to preach. As the majestic figure began to exert itself there was a deep silence. Presently a general 'Amin' was intoned by the crowd at the conclusion of some long sentence. And at last, towards the end of the sermon, every third or fourth word was followed by the simultaneous rise and fall of thousands of voices...<sup>59</sup>

Burton does not tell us here what the preacher actually said. Perhaps, far back, he could not even hear very well. The important point in the picture he paints is the magnificent spectacle, of a great mass of people all acting in unison in the



pursuit of a religious ideal. It would seem significant that he so clearly identifies it as the most moving religious sight he has ever witnessed.

In the next chapter, 'Life at Makkah, and Umrah', Burton touches on the subject of Pilgrimage ceremonies and compares them to European folk customs:

Of Pilgrimage ceremonies I cannot speak harshly...what nation, either in the West or in the East, has been able to cast out from its ceremonies every suspicion of its old idolatry? What are the English mistletoe, the Irish wake, the Pardon of Brittany, the Carnival, and the Worship at Iserna? Better far to consider the Makkan pilgrimage rites in the light of Evil-worship turned into lessons of Good than to philosophize about their strangeness, and to blunder in asserting them to be insignificant. Even the Badawi circumambulating the Ka'abah fortifies his wild belief by the fond thought that he treads the path of 'Allah's friend'.<sup>60</sup>

It is certainly significant that Burton's tendency is always to be ambiguous towards past and present criticisms of Islam. It would be difficult to find a single passage in the *Pilgrimage* that is clearly critical of Islam as a religion, rather than of the practices of individual Muslims.<sup>61</sup>

Burton is also indulgent about the Islamic tradition that Abraham and his son built the Ka'abah:

As regards the Makkan and Muslim belief that Ibrahim and his son built the Ka'abah, it may be observed the Genesitic account of the Great Patriarch has suggested to learned men the idea of two Ibrahims...Muslim historians all agree in representing Ibrahim as a star-worshipper in youth, and Eusebius calls the patriarch son of Athar; his father's name, therefore, is no Arab invention. Whether Ishmael or his sire ever visited Makkah to build the Ka'abah is, in my humble opinion, an open question. The Jewish Scripture informs us only that the patriarch dwelt at Beersheba and Gerar in the south-west of Palestine, without any allusion to the annual visit which Muslims declare he paid to their Holy City. At the same time Arab tradition speaks clearly and consistently upon the subject, and generally omits those miraculous and superstitious adjuncts which cast shadows of sore doubt upon the philosophic mind.<sup>62</sup>

Here Christian belief is relegated to the level of being a 'Jewish Scripture' and Islamic ideas on the matter are portrayed as clearly more reliable--just as earlier Burton took pains to suggest equivalence between Christianity and Islam and even

to present Islam as another Christian reformation.

Having now looked at the various arguments concerning Burton's motivations and beliefs in some detail and also having examined the more relevant sections of Burton's *Pilgrimage* which seem to bear on this issue, is it possible to come to any definite and sure conclusions?

The materials which seem to suggest that Burton was a typical English gentleman of the nineteenth-century in his beliefs on colonialism and the benefits of British rule, certainly do not contradict, in themselves, the possibility that he was also a secret Sufi Muslim. Burton was a proud Englishman who believed his compatriots to bring sound and stable rule to those parts of the world they colonized--and in this regard one might consider Burton's earlier remarks about the British at some point needing to establish a protectorate over the Holy Places of Islam. If Burton was a secret Muslim, sympathetic to the Shi'a persuasion, then he might be eager for his countrymen to take over Makkah and Madinah, in order to protect them from the very real threat of the Wahhabis who had already caused so much damage in Madinah. Perhaps it would even be possible for him to believe in some reciprocal process, where in reward for extending a protecting hand over Madinah and Makkah, the British would eventually be the first of the European great powers to embrace Islam. At the very least, Burton might have believed that British control of Makkah and Madinah would result in greater harmony and understanding between two great peoples. No evidence for such a belief can be extrapolated directly from the materials available, but some might think that it is a reasonable conclusion based on the weight of circumstantial evidence. Of course, this would seem contrary to Said's view of Burton as an agent of empire, able to understand the rules and codes of alien societies without necessarily attaching himself to them. However, even if we grant that there is some truth in Said's view, it does not necessarily contradict the possibility that, for a time at least, Burton saw himself spiritually as being a Sufi Muslim. It was not necessary for such a belief to come into open conflict with his plans to help England and advance his own position within its social structure.

It is quite possible then, to assume that Burton's very real patriotism and belief in Empire did not in themselves exclude the possibility that he was also a Muslim

at the time of his Hajj journey, reconciling contradictions in his own mind, by reference to the secret practice of 'taqiya'. The references to Christianity, Jesus, and occidental beliefs in the *Pilgrimage* are not so frequent, nor so heart-felt, as to make one feel sure that Burton was undoubtedly being sincere. He had many reasons, as we have already seen, for portraying himself as a daredevil adventurer in foreign lands, whose wish to help his mother country thrust him constantly into mortal danger. Any dishonesty implied in this attitude, as we have seen, might be explained by reference to the Ishma'ili belief in 'taqiya'. He belonged to a sect of Islam that positively prided itself on dissimulation and secrecy. Of course, whether this was enough to really convince a mind as complex and contradictory as Burton's in the long run, is a moot point.

Perhaps the strongest support for Burton's possible conversion to Islam is provided by his frequent eulogies of Islamic practices and traditions in the *Pilgrimage*, many of which we have considered in some detail. Is it probable that a man who could complete the Hajj in the company of Arabs from Madinah and Makkah, who spoke Arabic very well and was able to recite large portions of the Qu'ran from memory--a man who was often more knowledgeable than the local Arabs themselves about Islamic theology--was no more than a Christian adventurer, concealing his true beliefs beneath a cloak of Islamic respectability? The probability seems strong that Burton was able to travel in Muslim lands for such long periods, in the company of Arabic Muslims from Madinah and Makkah, because in his own heart of hearts, he considered himself to be their brother in the faith of Islam.

If indeed Burton did consider himself to be a Muslim at the time of the *Pilgrimage*, this does not necessarily mean that this faith undoubtedly endured throughout his whole life. Burton's spiritual journey was certainly a very long and tortuous one and he probably adhered to several differing beliefs throughout his lengthy search for a spiritual home. However, it would probably be fair to say that Islam appears to have had the deepest and most long lasting effect on his psyche.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER 5

<sup>1</sup> In the chapter that follows I will not be treating of Burton's long association and eventual feud with Speke. Nevertheless, Burton's obstinacy in continually disputing the truth of Speke's discovery of Lake Nyanza as the source of the Nile is indicative of how perverse Burton could be when confronted with facts he didn't like. Dane Kennedy writes: "Meanwhile Burton had begun to make a case for Lake Tanganyika as the true source of the Nile, suggesting that the river intersected other bodies of water to the north, such as Lake Nyanza, as it wended its way to Egypt and the Mediterranean. His self-serving argument was almost entirely speculative and seemed inspired in large measure by spite..." See *The Highly Civilized Man* (123). The veracity of Speke's earlier claim was finally shown to be true in 1875 when Stanley successfully circumnavigated Lake Nyanza.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps we should not take Bartema's (often spelt "Vartema") "eye-witness" account too seriously as he seems to have been most interested in telling a good story. At one point he speaks of seeing unicorns near the Ka'aba: "On the other side of the Caaba is a walled court, in which we saw two unicorns, which were pointed out to us as a rarity; and they are indeed truly remarkable. The larger of the two is built like a three-year-old colt, and has a horn upon the forehead about three ells long. This animal has the color of a yellowish-brown horse, a head like astag, a neck very long, with a thin mane; the legs are small and slender, like those of a hind or roe; the hoofs of goat. These two animals were sent to the sultan of Mecca, as a rarity of great value." See Edward Robinson, ed. *Calmets Dictionary of the Holy Bible* (London: Samuel Etheridge, 1812).

<sup>3</sup> William Martin Leake, Acting Secretary of the African Association, makes it clear in his preface to Burckhardt's book on Syria, that the Association had encouraged Burckhardt to study in Syria in order to prepare himself for travels in Arabian lands: "The Association having had the good fortune to obtain a person of Mr. Burckhardt's education and talents, resolved to spare neither time nor expense in enabling him to acquire the language and manners of an Arabian Musulman in such a degree of perfection, as should render the detection of his real character...extremely difficult." See John Burckhardt, *Travels in Syria and the Holy Land* (London: Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa, 1822) 1.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Richard F. Burton, *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* (New Delhi: Goodword Books, 2002) 740.

<sup>5</sup> It is very clear that Burckhardt's account is far more detailed and objective than Burton's.

<sup>6</sup> John Lewis Burckhardt, *Travels in Arabia* (Lenox, MA: Hard Press, 2006) 146.

<sup>7</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 648.

<sup>8</sup> *Travels in Arabia* 263.

<sup>9</sup> *Travels in Arabia* 263.

<sup>10</sup> *Travels in Arabia* 297.

- <sup>11</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 475.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 477-478.
- <sup>13</sup> Edward Rice, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton: A Biography* (Cambridge MA: Da Capo, 2001) 206.
- <sup>14</sup> Rice 202.
- <sup>5</sup> Sir Richard F. Burton, *El Islam* (London: Hutchinson, 1898).
- <sup>16</sup> Rice 236.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 18
- <sup>18</sup> Rice, 206.
- <sup>19</sup> Rice 207.
- <sup>20</sup> Rice 232.
- <sup>21</sup> Rice 232.
- <sup>22</sup> *Orientalism*. 195.
- <sup>23</sup> *Orientalism* 195-196.
- <sup>24</sup> *Orientalism* 196.
- <sup>25</sup> *Orientalism* 196.
- <sup>26</sup> Rice 127.
- <sup>27</sup> Rice 123-124.
- <sup>28</sup> Rice 286-328.
- <sup>29</sup> See W. G. Palgrave, *Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia, 1862-1863*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1865) (Reprinted many times).
- <sup>30</sup> Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Pilgrimage*, Third Edition, London: W. Mullin, 1898.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 603.

<sup>32</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 648.

<sup>33</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 672.

<sup>34</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 672.

<sup>35</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 685.

<sup>36</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 474-475.

<sup>37</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 25.

<sup>38</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 25-26.

<sup>39</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 41-42.

<sup>40</sup> Initially, only the Near East and the Indian sub-continent was well-known to Europe; consequently, all Asians tended to be classed as “Orientals”.

<sup>41</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah*, 43-44.

<sup>42</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 45.

<sup>43</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 171.

<sup>44</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 169.

<sup>45</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 136.

<sup>46</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 139.

<sup>47</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 143.

<sup>48</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 140.

<sup>49</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 344.

<sup>50</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 66.

<sup>51</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 259.

<sup>52</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 292.

<sup>53</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 307.

<sup>54</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 362.

<sup>55</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 449-450.

<sup>56</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 529.

<sup>57</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 529-530.

<sup>58</sup> *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 530. Burton is probably referring to a supposed decree of the Council of Macon in 585 A.D. A declaration that women never had souls was, almost certainly, never made at this council and the belief that it was is almost certainly due to a misinterpreted jest. See, Michael Nolan, "Do Women Have Souls", p.1. 2006, 16 May 2008 <<http://www.churchinhistory.org/pages/booklets/women-souls-1.htm>>

<sup>59</sup> *Pilgrimage* 666-667.

<sup>60</sup> *Pilgrimage* 677.

<sup>61</sup> Most of Burton's scorn is reserved for Indians (see *Pilgrimage* 43-44).

<sup>62</sup> *Pilgrimage* 678-679.





## CHAPTER SIX

### WHITE SKIN, ARAB MASK: POLYGENISM AND BURTON'S SOJOURN IN HARAR

In this chapter, I will relate Said's well-known position as stated in his book *Orientalism* to Richard F. Burton and his travel narrative, *First Footsteps in East Africa*. While Said has made very important additions to Western views of Islam and the "East", his perspective is in some ways insufficiently nuanced, and Burton, in particular, has become an undeserved victim of his widely diffused views.

As is well known, according to Said, the Orient and its study in the West was actually a cultural extension of eighteenth and nineteenth century British and French imperialism. Said focuses in particular on Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798. From that time onwards, the two most successful European colonial powers attempted to distil all the knowledge of the conquered East into the new discourse of Orientalism, which was a way of diminishing the East to something less than the triumphant West. Said gives the picturesque and imaginative image of Orientalism as a stage on which all the complexities of Eastern life were played out in a curtailed and simplified way for Western tastes.<sup>1</sup> While ostensibly interested in knowledge of the East for its own sake, Orientalism was really a kind of cultural hand-maiden for British and French imperialism of the period. It is Said's further contention that this discourse of Orientalism has continued to do its work right through the twentieth century, and even into the twenty-first, in seemingly new and diverse, but essentially unchanging ways:

As a system of thought about the Orient, it always rose from the specifically human detail to the general transhuman one; an observation about a tenth century Arab poet multiplied itself into a policy towards (and about) the Oriental mentality in Egypt, Iraq, or Arabia. Similarly a verse from the Koran would be considered the best evidence of an ineradicable Muslim sensuality. Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient, absolutely different...from the West. And Orientalism, in its post-eighteenth-century

form, could never revise itself.<sup>2</sup>

There are problems in presenting Burton as a son of Empire dissembling the East for the ears and tastes of his imperialist masters. On the contrary, as Rice has argued, this is a man who was able to learn Arabic well enough to pass as an educated Muslim and might even have become a Sufi Muslim during his long sojourn in Sind or modern Pakistan. Burton successfully completed the Hajj, or once in a lifetime pilgrimage to Makkah, and, shortly afterwards, was the first white man to successfully enter and subsequently leave alive the Muslim city of Harar, in Eastern Africa (an early expedition that I will be looking at in some detail in the present chapter). Said registers these achievements but only to interpret Burton as a seeming exception to the rules of Orientalism that actually proves the truth of his essential theory:

As a traveling adventurer Burton conceived of himself as sharing the life of the people in whose lands he lived. Far more successfully than T.E. Lawrence, he was able to become an Oriental; he not only spoke the language flawlessly, he was able to penetrate to the heart of Islam and, disguised as an Indian Muslim doctor, accomplish the pilgrimage to Mecca. Yet Burton's most extraordinary characteristic is, I believe, that he was preternaturally knowledgeable about the degree to which human life in society was governed by rules and codes.<sup>3</sup>

As Said acknowledges, Burton has imbibed the Orientalist store of knowledge, and it has enabled him to live in a vibrant and truthful way with Orientals inside the Orient itself (or, it has at least, made a significant contribution to this process). Said gets round this problem by suggesting that Burton appropriated the Orient for the purpose of controlling it, and Orientalism was the means by which Burton could possess and manipulate the East. However, it was not sufficient for Burton to use Orientalist knowledge for its hidden purpose of aiding and justifying imperialist expansion. Rather, he took this knowledge and applied it in individualistic ways that would reflect glory on Burton; though finally, this knowledge was to be used in order to lead to exactly the required outcome for applications of Orientalist disciplines: further conquests in the East.

This is an ingenious attempt by Said to fit Burton into his overall thesis on

Orientalism, but, in the final analysis, it doesn't work. If Orientalism is a largely misleading body of knowledge, constructing a static and unchanging East, how is Burton able to use it so well to interact with ordinary "Orientals" on a day to day basis (especially in his early trips to Makkah and Harar)? Burton understood the people he met as they really were, due in part to his extensive studies, practical experience and genuine admiration for Islam. There was nothing 'static' or 'false' about the knowledge he held. Indeed, his life sometimes depended on the subtlety and truth of that knowledge.

Said's explanation of Burton's profound and practical knowledge of the East as being due to his mastery of society's "rules" is also unconvincing. Rather, he was someone who was largely unwilling to adapt his behavior when confronted with people and situations that he was unable to feel any sympathy with.<sup>4</sup>

I now intend to examine Burton's account of his visit to Harar, *First Footsteps in Eastern Africa*, as a way of continuing to question Said's assessment of Burton. I will argue that Burton's knowledge of Islam and the East, acquired through study and practical experience, proves itself to have been profound, often deeply sympathetic to the East (specifically, Islam), and above all subtle and dynamic in its application to real events on the ground. Burton's decision to focus his attention on Africa and the Muslim city of Harar, after previously having visited Makkah and Madinah in Arabia, itself goes some way towards arguing for Burton's understanding of the diversity of the Islamic and "Oriental" world.

After Burton's success in performing the pilgrimage to Makkah, it was perhaps natural enough that he would look for another similar challenge that would make good use of his knowledge of Islam and Arabic. The city of Harar had been built in the 12th century of the Christian era and was said to be the fourth most Holy city in Islam.<sup>5</sup> Under Ahmed Grag, in 1520, Harar invaded large parts of Ethiopian territory, and it was only through the help of the Portuguese that the Hararis were beaten back.<sup>6</sup> Since that time, the Hararis had kept themselves to themselves, though they retained a reputation for ferocity. The city was enclosed by a four meter high wall that was pierced by five gates, supposedly representing the Five Pillars of Islam. These gates were situated to the north, east, south-east, south and west of the city. They provided entry to caravans travelling to and from

different parts of the surrounding country and were always kept heavily guarded. At the time of Burton's journey, Harar was known as a closed town that was hostile to Christians. It was only after 1875, when the Egyptians took control that Harar began to slowly open up to the outside world.<sup>7</sup>

In the very first pages of his account, Burton makes plain the reasons for his attempt to enter the walled city of Harar:

I doubt not that there are many who ignore the fact that in Eastern Africa, scarcely three hundred miles distant from Aden, there is a counterpart of ill-famed Timbuctoo in the Far West. The more adventurous Abyssinian travellers, Salt and Stuart, Krapf and Isenberg, Barker and Rochet...attempted Harar, but attempted it in vain. The bigoted ruler and barbarous people threatened death to the Infidel who ventured within their walls...Thus the various travellers who appeared in beaver and black coats became persuaded that the city was inaccessible, and Europeans ceased to trouble themselves about Harar...It is therefore, a point of honour with me...to utilize my title of Haji by entering the city, visiting the ruler, and returning in safety, after breaking the guardian spell.<sup>8</sup>

Burton presents at the outset his status as a "Haji" (one who has performed the pilgrimage to Makkah) in the Muslim world. Burton is conscious that he has earned the *right* to enter Harar. A Haji is recognized in Islam as one who has performed a sacred duty, and Burton seems to consider it as only his due to be invited cordially inside Harar. It may well be true that Burton was often all things to all men, and sometimes appears to have possessed the ability to genuinely believe himself to be different things at different times. On the trip to Harar, he seems to have regarded himself as an experienced Muslim who had completed the dangerous Hajj expedition. On other occasions, he was equally able to think himself an English imperialist, a Christian and a loyal Englishman.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Burton seems here to be something more than a man playing a complicated game of "rules". Whatever role he is playing, Burton is able to throw himself imaginatively into the part to the point where he *becomes* the man he wishes to be.

Later, in the same chapter, Burton speaks of his pleasure at reaching the town of Zayla on the Somali coast and settling in there:

The well-known sounds of Al-Islam returned from memory. Again the melodious chant of the Muezzin—no evening bell can compare with it for solemnity and beauty— and in the neighbouring mosque, the loudly intoned Amin and Allaho Akbar—far superior to any organ—rang in my ear...Nightfall was ushered in by the song, the dance, and the marriage festival—here no permission is required for ‘native music in the lines’—and muffled figures flitted mysteriously through the dark alleys. After a peep through the open window, I fell asleep, feeling once more at home.<sup>10</sup>

Is this the mere dissembling of a man who can understand and manipulate the different sets of rules possessed by various societies? Are these the words of a man who has imbibed the static “veracities” of Orientalism in the sure knowledge of the superiority of his own culture and religion? Burton’s words are clear and unambiguous: he compares Islam favorably with life in the West and—explicitly—with Christianity. Of the chant of the Muezzin, he tells us that “no evening bell can compare with it for solemnity and beauty”, while in the nearby mosque “the loudly intoned Amin and Allaho Akbar—far superior to any organ—rang in my ear.” Burton, in these passages, is not merely suggesting an equivalence between Islamic and Christian practices, but provocatively presenting the superiority of Islam. To emphasize this point, the comforting, even cozy, picture concludes with Burton falling asleep, “feeling once more at home.”

In *Orientalism*, Said theorizes about Burton and his motives, but hardly quotes a word directly. It is much more difficult to sustain a picture of Burton as an imperialist dissembler, full of static Orientalist knowledge and ideas of Western superiority, in the face of passages like these. Here is an everyday interaction with the East that stands in sharp contrast to the static notions of Orientalism. Rather than a suppressed sense of superiority over the culture and traditions of Islam, Burton feels once more “at home” in the bosom of a faith that he seems to understand and appreciate more than his native Christianity. Certainly, he understands the “rules” of Al-Islam, but much more is present than this in the above passage: there is something approaching a deep affection, even love, for the culture and religion of the Muslims.

In the second chapter of *First Footsteps*, “Life in Zayla”, Burton speaks of how he and his companions pass their time:

Sometimes the room is filled with Arabs, Sayyids, merchants, and others settled in the place...More generally the assembly is one of the Somal, who talk in their own tongue, laugh, yell, stretch their legs, and lie like cattle upon the floor, smoking the common Hukkah, which stands in the centre, industriously cleaning their teeth with sticks, and eating snuff like Swedes. Meanwhile, I occupy the Kursi or couch, sometimes muttering from a book to excite respect, or reading aloud for general information, or telling fortunes by palmistry, or drawing out a horoscope.<sup>11</sup>

Although there is the demeaning suggestion that the Somal “lie like cattle”, the overall tone of this passage is one of companionability and easy enjoyment. Burton, indeed, goes on to comment on his appreciation of this culture and his respect for the bonds between men within it:

It argues “peculiarity”, I own, to enjoy such a life. In the first place there is no woman’s society: Al-Islam seems purposely to have loosened the ties between the sexes in order to strengthen the bonds which connect man and man. Secondly, your house is by no means your castle. You must open your doors to your friend at all hours; if when inside it suit him to sing, sing he will; and until you learn solitude in a crowd, or the art of concentration, you are apt to become *ennuye* and irritable.<sup>12</sup>

It may argue “peculiarity” to enjoy this kind of life, but there is a strong sense in the cited passage that Burton actually does do so. This is supported by the footnote that accompanies Burton’s observation concerning the separation of the sexes in Islam.

This is one of the stock complaints against the Moslem scheme. Yet is it not practically the case with ourselves? In European society, the best are generally those who prefer the companionship of their own sex; the ‘ladies’ man’ and the woman who avoids women are rarely choice specimens.<sup>13</sup>

Once again, Burton defends Islamic culture here: although he asserts an equivalence, the examples he cites suggest that “the Muslim scheme” is superior.

Later in the same chapter, Burton describes the simple Friday prayers at Zayla in indulgent terms and compares the rather Spartan mosque with a village church in some forgotten corner of rural England:

On Friday—our Sunday—a drunken crier goes about the town, threatening the bastinado to all who neglect their five prayers. At half-past eleven a kettle drum sounds a summons to the Jami or Cathedral. It is an old barn rudely plastered with whitewash...I enter with a servant carrying a prayer carpet, encounter the stare of 300 pair of eyes, belonging to parallel rows of squatters, recite the customary two-bow prayer in honour of the mosque, placing sword and rosary before me, and then, taking up a Koran, read the Cow Chapter . . . loud and twangingly.<sup>14</sup>

To begin with, this sends a critical description of Islamic worship: the “drunken cries”, the coercion of the worshippers, the “old barn rudely plastered”. In this context, his precise performance of a role could seem like an assertion of authority. However, Burton’s account then proceeds to suggest that

There is a queer kind of family likeness between this scene and that of a village church in some quiet nook of rural England...(but) There are many salient points of difference. No bonnets appear in public: the squire, after prayers, gives alms to the poor, and departs escorted by two dozen matchlock-men, who perseveringly fire their shotted guns, as in Ireland, blunderbusses.<sup>15</sup>

On the surface, then, this might appear to be the rather minute description of Islamic practices expected from an Orientalist of the type described by Said. However, as the passage proceeds, there is no presumption concerning the superiority of England and the rural church over Al Islam and the country mosque. On the contrary, the picture painted is essentially one of parity and likeness, except for the differences enumerated at the end, which at least in the description of the squire, hypocritically giving alms and then departing with an armed bodyguard, would seem to tell in Islam’s favor. Even the absence of “bonnets” seems to meet with Burton’s tacit approval.

In the third chapter of *First Footsteps*, Burton takes some excursions around Zayla, and visits the tomb of a Muslim saint with all the piety one might expect to be reserved for a visitation to the last resting place of a Christian saint:

The Shaykh Ibrahim Abu Zarbay lies under a whitewashed dome close to the Ashurbara Gate of Zayla: an inscription cut in wood over the doorway informs us that the building dates from A.H. 1155=A.D. 1741-2...The building is divided into two compartments, forming a Mosque and a Mazar

or place of pious visitation: in the latter are five tombs, the two largest covered with common chintz stuff of glaring colours. Ibrahim was one of the forty-four Hasrami saints who landed at Berberah, sat in solemn conclave upon Auliya Kumbo or Holy Hill, and thence dispersed far and wide for the purpose of propagandism. He traveled to Harar about A.D. 1430, converted many to El-Islam, and left there an honoured memory.<sup>16</sup>

As before, what appears on the surface to be a scholarly description subtly begins to become an appreciation of the achievements of Islam. Burton does not say that Shaykh Ibrahim was “thought to be” one of the Hasrami saints who “converted many to El-Islam.” Rather he “was” one of these forty-four saints. There is something heroic in the picture of the forty-four saints, seated on the Holy Hill, waiting to disperse “far and wide” for the purpose of religious proselytization.

When Burton and his colleagues finally enter Harar, it is to Burton’s purpose to exaggerate the danger and importance of his visit. Consequently, the first volume of the work concludes with the following words:

I was under the roof of a bigoted prince whose least word was death; amongst a people who detest foreigners; the only European that had ever passed over their inhospitable threshold, and the fated instrument of their future downfall.<sup>17</sup>

This highly dramatic presentation--which is very much at one with earlier descriptions of danger in the *Pilgrimage*--becomes something far more mundane when Burton begins to actually describe his sojourn in Harar. His knowledge of Arabic and Islam, together with his status as a Haji, combine to make his ten-day stay more tedious than dangerous. Burton describes how he passed his time examining the city’s main places of interest, much more like an interested and scholarly Muslim than an agent of the hated West:

The present city of Harar is about one mile long by half that breadth. An irregular wall, lately repaired, but ignorant of cannon, is pierced with five large gates, and supported by oval towers of artless construction. . . . The only large building is the Jami or Cathedral, a long barn of poverty-stricken appearance, with broken-down gates, and two white-washed minarets of truncated conoid shape. . . . The city abounds in mosques, plain buildings without minarets, and in graveyards stuffed with tombs—oblong troughs formed by long slabs planted edgewise on the ground. I need scarcely say



that Harar is proud of her learning, sanctity, and holy dead. The principal saint buried in the city is Shaykh Umar Abadir al-Bakri, originally from Jeddah, and now the patron of Harar: he lies under a little dome in the southern quarter of the city, near the Bisidimo Gate.<sup>18</sup>

Burton does not need to tell a Muslim audience of the religious things for which Harar is famous but, for his Western readers Harar would be far more well-known for its secrecy and hatred for Christians. Lost in his Islamic interests, Burton describes the city more from the point of view of a Muslim scholar, than a secret Christian.

Later, while in discussion with the Jirads, or “councilors” of Harar, Burton recounts how he is able to impress them with the depth of his theological learning:

The Jirad, after polite inquiries, seated me by his right hand upon the Dais, where I ate Kat and fingered my rosary, while he transacted the business of the day. Then one of the elders took from a little recess in the wall a large book, and uncovering it, began to recite a long Dua or Blessing upon the Prophet... This exercise, lasting half an hour afforded me the opportunity—much desired—of making an impression... Opinions were divided as to the order of beings, when I explained that human nature, which amongst Muslims is *not* a little lower than the angelic, ranked highest, because of it were created prophets, and saints, whereas the other is but a “Wasitah” or connection between the Creator and his creatures. My theology won general approbation and a few kinder glances from the elders.<sup>19</sup>

Burton is clearly completely at home in this company, debating points of theology with important Muslims and even showing the superiority of his own knowledge. For what reason would such a man as Burton be in any real danger in Harar? Given the depth of his knowledge and scholarship, it would be fanciful for anyone in the city to suspect him of being a Christian or an adherent of another faith. As stated earlier, it is possible that Burton truly regarded himself as a Muslim during this period of his life, and so the risk he was running by entering Harar, was by no means as great as he would often have us believe. At the same time, this would certainly appear to be an example of Burton using his knowledge and expertise to react with Muslims in their daily lives in a dynamic way. There is nothing of Edward Said’s ossified and static “Orientalism” about his procedures here.

After successfully taking leave of Harar, Burton, on the ride to Berberah, passes the holy hill “Auliya Kumbo”:

As the light of day waned, we passed on the right hand a table-formed hill, apparently a detached fragment of the sub-Ghauts or coast range. This spot is celebrated in local legends as “Auliya Kumbo”, the Mount of Saints, where the forty-four Arab Santons sat in solemn conclave before dispersing over the Somali country to preach El-Islam. It lies about six miles of hard walking from Berberah.<sup>20</sup>

Once again, in recounting local history and legend, the language used by Burton is heroic and noble. The place is “celebrated”, and the Arabs “sat in solemn conclave”. They didn’t simply leave the hill but “dispersed” from it “over the Somali country to preach Al-Islam.” There is exactly the note of wonder here that one would expect from a true believer. Just forty-four Arab “Saints” converted all the Somali country to Al-Islam! Once more, we are left in little doubt as to where Burton’s deepest sympathies lie.

In all the passages cited so far, Burton’s understanding and emotional sympathy for the Islamic religion is strongly in evidence. I would argue that this reflects a deep propensity towards Islam, rather than simply a man who was able to pass himself off as a Muslim and Arab, while really retaining all the prejudices and superiority complexes of the West. All these passages suggest a man who had a real and deep understanding of Islam and the East, and was consequently able to use available knowledge to feed and deepen his fascination and ardor.

On the other hand, it is true, that there are sections of *First Footsteps* (as we shall see) that tend to show a rather superficial fascination on Burton’s part with a static classification of knowledge into sometimes rather dubious, Orientalist-like, categories. However, if some aspects of Orientalism’s nineteenth-century classificatory procedures, seem rather racist and doubtful to us today, it should be borne in mind that nineteenth-century science was very much a work in progress. Though sometimes mistaken in his methodology and approach to historical and ethnographical matters, Burton still emerges as a pioneer at the forefront of nineteenth-century scientific developments.

In the 1860s, as George Stocking relates in his much-cited book *Victorian*

*Anthropology*, the old Biblical framework started to unravel and be replaced by a “misanthropic” evolutionism that was full of racial assumptions.<sup>21</sup> If the new *deus ex machina* was evolution and people, like animals, had developed through a process of natural selection, then it seemed clear (at least to the Victorians, preoccupied as they were by the importance of power and status) how much better Europeans must have adapted to their environment than the other races of the world. Of course, successful adaptation to an environment in evolutionary terms is not the same thing as the development of a complex civilization, but evolutionists of the time did not necessarily make such distinctions.

The middle of the nineteenth-century saw a growing debate about monogenism and polygenism or a belief in either a single or multiple origin of humanity. In 1813, James Cowles Prichard published his *Researches into the Physical History of Man* in two volumes in which he argued that although humanity had originally been only one species it had subsequently divided into permanent varieties or races.<sup>22</sup> Later in the century, this luke-warm monogenist view of human origins was opposed by a polygenist idea of an independent development for the different races of man. Although polygenist ideas, as Stocking indicates, could be traced back as far as Paracelsus<sup>23</sup> such views were given a new impetus in the middle of the nineteenth-century by colonial expansion and the American dispute over slavery.<sup>24</sup> In particular, the opinions of Samuel Morton (1799-1851)<sup>25</sup> in America and Paul Broca (1824-1880)<sup>26</sup> in France helped to create a favorable intellectual climate for the diffusion of these ideas.

The polygenist view of human origin was rejected by both Darwin and Tylor. Nevertheless, a grey area continued to exist as the theory of monogenism implicitly (if unscientifically) perpetuated several racist ideas of the polygenist type. In *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture*, Herbert F. Tucker points out Darwin’s ambiguity on this topic:

In *Descent* Darwin’s chapter on “The Races of Man” repudiated the notion that differing races comprised separate species and acknowledged “that it is hardly possible to discover clear distinctive characters between them.” But uncritical assumptions about the inherent superiority of “civilized” Europeans erupt in his text nevertheless; he expresses surprise that Fuegians and a “full-blooded negro” on board the *Beagle* shared his own mental traits.<sup>27</sup>

Tucker also goes on to point out how Victorian science was implicated and to some extent complicit in the expansion of the British Empire:

Victorian science . . . both reflected and hoped to construct in vital ways assumptions about race that also underlay the expansion of the British Empire in the last third of the century. Indeed, another principle development of Victorian science is anthropology, the interdisciplinary field that emerged from philology, travel writing, folk-lore, law, philosophy, and immediately out of physical anthropology and ethnology. . . . In 1871, the Royal Anthropological Institute was founded and Tylor published his landmark *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*. Like nineteenth-century science as a whole...anthropology was being transformed into an organized body of professionals committed to shared methodologies and credentialing.<sup>28</sup>

Like Darwin, Tylor too supported the monogenist theory of man. George Stocking writes:

Tylor was . . . very much concerned with the traditional ethnological problem of human unity...When he drew the strands of his *Researches* together by relating them to “some widely circulated Ethnological theories, the first (although not so labelled) was polygenism: “the facts collected seem to favour the view that the wide differences in the civilization and mental state of the various races of mankind are rather differences of development than of origin, rather of degree than of kind.”<sup>29</sup>

Tylor’s rejection of polygenism seems muted here with an apparent acceptance of “the wide differences in . . . the mental state” of the races of mankind. Such ambiguity in ideas about race, go some way towards explaining Burton’s own ambiguities in this area. The same man who could, as we have seen, prefer the Islamic religion to Christianity was also, on occasions, guilty of making racist assumptions about human diversity.

In the second part of the nineteenth century, there were two prominent groups of evolutionist thinkers in Britain: the ‘ethnologicals’ and the ‘anthropologicals’. Originally, the latter was a group which had broken away from the Ethnological Society over its decision to admit women.<sup>30</sup> However, the essential ideological difference between the two groups was the anthropologicals’ support of polygenism, as opposed to the ethnologicals’ belief in monogenism. Indeed, the

founder of the anthropologicals, Dr. James Hunt,<sup>31</sup> was not even a follower of Darwin. Stocking writes:

Despite the modern ring of many passages in Hunt's dissertations on the nature of anthropology, he made it a point to insist on his opposition to Darwinism, and that of his society as well. Like Knox, he was influenced by German and French transcendental biologists, and while he was willing to hypothesize the "mutability of species," he would not accept the Darwinian mechanism.<sup>32</sup>

Dane Kennedy emphasizes the energy and passion with which Burton threw in his lot with Hunt's overtly racist anthropologicals:

In collaboration with Dr. James Hunt, the new society's dynamic president, Burton sought to turn ethnology into a biological science of race, signified by the term anthropology. This meant giving greater attention to the anatomical dimensions of human variation such as skull size and body shape, differences that could be measured, weighed, and otherwise quantified and classified, a key criterion of scientific status.<sup>33</sup>

It should be well noted how closely Burton's racist descriptions of African peoples fit in with this obsession for measurement and classification.

Despite the absence of this kind of blatant racism on the part of the Darwinian "ethnologicals", it would be a mistake to believe that the latter were totally in opposition to racist views. Stocking writes,

The opponents of Hunt's "anthropologicals", the Darwinian "ethnologicals" were far from regarding all the races of men as presently equal in capacity; nor did they view their science as totally lacking social and political relevance. But...their notions of scientific respectability would not permit them to embrace the blatantly racist scientific activism symbolized by the Cannibal Club.<sup>34</sup>

As Stocking notes, the anthropologicals included the members of the secretive Cannibal Club, who used a mace in their meetings that was shaped in the form of an African head. Burton himself was a member of the infamous Cannibal Club.<sup>35</sup>

In chapter four of *First Footsteps*, Burton gives his account of the origins of the Somali "race". He begins with the kind of physical description, common to

Victorian accounts of other peoples:

The male figure is tall and somewhat ungainly. In only one instance I observed an approach to the steatopyge, making the shape to resemble the letter S; but the shoulders are high, the trunk is straight, the thighs fall off, the shin bones bow slightly forwards, and the feet, like the hands, are coarse, large, and flat.<sup>36</sup>

Having reduced the Somali people to a single body type, he then proceeds, like other Victorian anthropologists, to reduce them to a single mental set. Interestingly, there is no sense of the history of Somalia to explain these particular fears and dislikes. They are presented as if genetic:

In mind the Somal are peculiar as in body. They are a people of most susceptible character, and withal uncommonly hard to please. They dislike the Arabs, fear and abhor the Turks, have a horror of Franks, and despise all other Asiatics who with them come under the general name of Hindi (Indians).<sup>37</sup>

Having reduced the Somali people to a single type, Burton then has no hesitation comparing them to other “types”:

They have all the levity and instability of the Negro character; light-minded as the Abyssinians...soft, merry, and affectionate souls, they pass without any apparent transition into a state of fury, when they are capable of terrible atrocities.<sup>38</sup>

Racist platitudes about the Somali character abound. The Somal have “the levity and instability of the negro character”, and as regards courage they “are no exception to the generality of savage races”<sup>39</sup> being perfectly content to murder a person while sleeping. Burton reproduces the normal prejudices of a nineteenth-century colonialist white man here.

Other examples of such an attitude are also to be found, for example, in Chapter six, where the Gudabirsi tribe is described:

In appearance the Gudabirsi are decidedly superior to their limitrophes the Isa. I have seen handsome faces amongst the men as well as the women. Some

approach closely to the Caucasian type: one old man, with olive coloured skin, bald brow, and white hair curling round his temples, and occiput, exactly resembled an Anglo-Indian veteran. Generally, however, the prognathous mouth betrays an African origin, and chewing tobacco mixed with ashes stains the teeth, blackens the gums, and mottles the lips. The complexion is the Abyssinian *café au lait*, contrasting strongly with the sooty skins of the coast; and the hair, plentifully anointed with rancid butter, hangs from the head in lank corkscrews the colour of a Russian pointer's coat. The figure is rather squat, but broad and well set.<sup>40</sup>

Although he describes some of the Gudabirsi as “handsome”, Burton clearly here assumes that the Caucasian ideal of beauty is the standard one for all. A few of the Gudabirsi are seen as approaching this ideal. The majority, however, possess “the prognathous mouth” that “betrays an African origin”. They are also unreliable, “inveterate liars” and so, presumably, not to be trusted.

In *First Footsteps*, Burton also occasionally betrays the sense of superiority that a nineteenth-century Englishman might be expected to hold in relation to the colonized inhabitants of Africa and Asia. Right at the beginning of his narrative, Burton speculates on the reasons why Englishmen, in particular, are hated by the inhabitants of Harar:

Of all foreigners the English were, of course, the most hated and dreaded; at Harar slavery still holds its head-quarters, and the old Dragon well knows what to expect from the hand of St. George.<sup>41</sup>

Here Burton shows his belief in England as a civilizing force for good in the world. The implication is clear: the English could be expected to put an end to slavery in Harar. Whatever his other beliefs, Burton was certainly traditional in many of his viewpoints about the relationship between Europe and the occupied lands of Africa and Asia.

Burton confronts his would-be interpreter with a character that is strange and contradictory. It is clear that his long sojourn in Sind and deep study of forms of Sufi Islam while there, is a fundamental factor in coming to any understanding of the man he later became: the man who performed the pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah, and a few years later was able to become the first European to successfully enter and depart from the Muslim city of Harar, in East Africa. There

are also, as we have seen, attitudes and elements of Burton's character that we might expect to find in an English army officer of the period. However, Burton's profound need to understand the issues and problems of the East was created by his own dynamic discovery of ways of life and patterns of behavior in the East, which apparently spoke to his deepest aspirations and desires more comprehensively and with more practical urgency than the body of knowledge and belief that he had acquired from his own culture.

In Burton's works there is nowhere to be found any serious criticism of Islam (though individual Muslims may come in for strong criticism at times), and, when this "Oriental" religion is compared with Christianity and other world faiths in Burton's thoughts, the comparison almost always works to the benefit of Islam. In no sense, then, should Burton be seen as a traditional Orientalist in the Said mold, having the subliminal intention of demonstrating the great superiority of Western over Eastern ways of life as a justification for European imperialist policies.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER SIX

<sup>1</sup> *Orientalism* xxi.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalism* 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Orientalism* 195.

<sup>4</sup> At certain crucial periods of his life Burton was unable to fit in with the people around him. His time spent at Oxford and in Damascus, come immediately to mind.

<sup>5</sup> However, after Makkah, Medina and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, there isn't universal agreement in Islam about the next most Holy city. In particular, there is disagreement between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims. See, Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: Norton, 2006) 169-1700.

<sup>6</sup> John L Esposito ed., *The Oxford History of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 501.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent from 1876-1912* (New York: Avon Books, 1992) 281.

<sup>8</sup> Richard F. Burton, *First Footsteps in East Africa* (New York: Dover Edition, 1987) Vol. 1, 1-2.



<sup>9</sup> See Chapter 1 on Burton's *Pilgrimage*.

<sup>10</sup> *First Footsteps* 17-18.

<sup>11</sup> *First Footsteps* 27.

<sup>12</sup> *First Footsteps* 27.

<sup>13</sup> *First Footsteps* 27.

<sup>14</sup> *First Footsteps* 43.

<sup>15</sup> *First Footsteps* 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> *First Footsteps* 54.

<sup>17</sup> *First Footsteps* 209.

<sup>18</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 2, 13-14.

<sup>19</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 2, 31-32.

<sup>20</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 2, 68.

<sup>21</sup> George Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1991) 272.

<sup>22</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1813/1973).

<sup>23</sup> Stocking 272.

<sup>24</sup> Kennedy 139-140.

<sup>25</sup> See Samuel George Morton, *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches, Based Upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculpture, and Crania of Races, and Upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1854). Morton is usually considered the originator of American ethnology and "scientific" racism.

<sup>26</sup> See Francis Schiller, *Paul Broca: Founder of French Anthropology, Explorer of the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Broca introduced the "science" of cranial anthropometry by developing new types of measuring instruments (craniometers) and numerical indices. The uses that racist scientists made of Broca's tools and conclusions have been analyzed by Stephen J. Gould in *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: Norton, 1996): "Theories are built upon the interpretation of numbers, and interpreters are often trapped by their own rhetoric. They believe in their own objectivity, and fail to discern the prejudice that leads them to one interpretation among many consistent with their numbers. Paul Broca is now distant enough. We can stand back and show that he used numbers, not to generate new theories, but to illustrate a priori conclusions" (106).

<sup>27</sup> Herbert F. Tucker, *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (Blackwell Companions to Literature and Culture) (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999) 43.

<sup>28</sup> Tucker 43.

<sup>29</sup> Stocking 159.

<sup>30</sup> Kennedy 135.

<sup>31</sup> *Victorian Anthropology*: “Hunt gave various justifications for the new group...But he seems to have been driven largely by the need to create an active, vital organization as a forum for his own racialist views” (247).

<sup>32</sup> Stocking 249.

<sup>33</sup> Kennedy 136.

<sup>34</sup> Stocking 272.

<sup>35</sup> See my earlier article: “The Origins of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Racism and Pornography”, “The Victorian”, Vol. 1.1, Aug. 13\_\_<http://journals.sfu.ca/vict/index.php/vict/article/view/18/9>

<sup>36</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 77.

<sup>37</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 77.

<sup>38</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 77-78.

<sup>39</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 78.

<sup>40</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 168.

<sup>41</sup> *First Footsteps in East Africa* Vol. 1, 2.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE GOLD MINES OF MIDIAN AND THE LAND OF MIDIAN REVISITED: BURTON'S "IMPERIAL EYES"

In his preface to *The Gold Mines of Midian*, Burton informs us that “the present publication” should be considered “a sequel and a continuation of my Pilgrimage to El Medinah and Meccah.”<sup>1</sup> It is difficult, however, to see the connection—other than the obvious one of it also being about a journey in Arabia. *The Gold Mines of Midian* is the narrative of Burton’s attempt to find gold in a north western area of Arabia, Midian, under the auspices of the Khediv of Egypt in 1877. Burton’s narrative does reintroduce Haji Wali, an old friend from the days of Burton’s *Pilgrimage*, but as a sequel to Burton’s great account of his journey to the two Holy cities of Islam, *The Gold Mines of Midian* falls lamentably short.

Nearly twenty-five years after that previous great adventure, Burton was in late middle age, married and pursuing a consular career in Trieste that left him little free time for exploration. Furthermore, *The Gold Mines of Midian* recounts only a first reconnaissance expedition that lasted barely two weeks: a humble enough journey on which to hang a sequel to the *Pilgrimage*. As might be expected, not much happens during this brief foray into north-west Arabia, and Burton fills most of his book with the minutest examination of local flora and fauna, geological speculation, historical re-enactment, and scientific and anthropological notes from previous travelers. The style is dry and scholarly throughout, and, if the intention was merely to set the scene for a far more interesting expedition in the future that would locate the gold of Midian and make Burton rich and a national hero in both Egypt and Britain, then that intention was based on a fallacy. The full expedition,

the details of which were recounted in Burton's two volume work, *The Land of Midian (Revisited)*, in 1879, found no minerals of great value, and Burton was left out of pocket for the expenses of the expedition.

The two-volume work which followed *The Gold Mines of Midian* is rarely read today. In spite of the interesting information collected during Burton's exploration of north and south Midian, the essential truth that no sources of gold were found during the expedition, marked it as a failure. Burton himself had hoped that the expedition would end his own financial difficulties by the discovery of gold in great quantities. The subsequent analysis of the minerals collected was disappointing, though Burton remained determinedly hopeful. When an analysis of Burton's samples by the Royal School of Mines in London proved pessimistic about the large-scale presence of gold in the area, Burton was prompted to add a more hopeful addendum:

Upon this able report I would offer the following observations. We, who have traveled through a country like Midian, finding everywhere extensive works for metallurgy; barrages and aqueducts, cisterns and tanks; furnaces, fire-bricks, and scoriae; open mines, and huge scatters of spalled quartz, with the remains of some eighteen cities and towns which apparently fell to ruin with the industry that founded and fed them;--we, I say, cannot but form a different and far higher idea of its mineral capabilities than those who determine them by the simple inspection of a few specimens. The learned Dr. Percy at once hits the mark when he surmises that worthless samples were brought home; and this would necessarily occur when no metallurgist, no practical prospector, was present with the Expedition. As will appear from the following pages, all the specimens were collected a ciel ouvert, and wholly without judgment.<sup>2</sup>

In fact no grand discovery of gold was to crown Burton's exploratory efforts and so the account of his expedition has a certain blunt edge from the beginning. If the explorations had been rewarded with the discovery of still-unworked gold mines, then the conclusion of the second book would have been triumphant. The failure to find significant deposits of gold reflects back unfavorably on the long account of the search for its discovery. The secondary geographical, historical, archaeological, botanical and mineralogical work of the expedition cannot finally compensate for the disappointment of not finding gold.

In the first volume of his work, Burton explores northern and eastern Midian, while, in the second, the interest is on southern Midian. It was Burton's belief that while northern Midian was rich in other metals, the expected gold was to be found in the southern region. However, as we have noted, no very substantial find was made anywhere. Nevertheless, the first volume begins hopefully enough:

Throughout the summer of 1877 I was haunted by memories of mysterious Midian... The tale of her rise and fall forcibly suggested Algeria, that province so opulent and splendid under the Masters of the World; converted into a fiery wilderness by the representatives of the "gentle and gallant" Turk, and brought to life once more by French energy and industry. And such was my vision of a future Midian, whose rich stores of various minerals will restore to her wealth and health, when the two Kedivial Expeditions shall have shown the world what she has been, and what she may be again.<sup>3</sup>

The expedition proper began from El Muwaylah on the north-western coast of Arabia, and the first three stages took the explorers to the White Mountain, or "Jebel el-Abyaz". Even in these early pages of Burton's account, the mood is set of growing disappointment, a mood which is to permeate both volumes:

We camped upon the old ground to the southwest of the Jebel el-Abyaz; and at the halt our troubles forthwith began. The water, represented to be near, is nowhere nearer than a two hours' march for camels; and it is mostly derived from rain-puddles in the great range of mountains which subtends maritime Midian. But this was our own discovery. The half-Fellah Bedawin, like the shepherds, their predecessors, in the days of Abimelech and Jethro, are ever chary of their treasure; the only object being extra camel-hire.<sup>4</sup>

Lacking the opportunity to describe the one find that he most desired, it is almost as if Burton was able to find compensation in a kind of prolix minutiae which, he hoped, even in the absence of gold finds, would justify his expedition:

The Jebel el-Abyaz is apparently the centre of the quartzose outcrop in North Midian (Madyan proper). We judged that it had been a little worked by the ancients, from the rents in the reef that outcrops, like a castle-wall, on the northern and eastern flanks. There are still traces of roads or paths; while heaps, strews, and scatters of stone, handbroken and not showing the natural fracture, whiten like snow the lower slopes of the western hill base. They contrast curiously with the hard felspathic stones and the lithographic

calcaires bearing the moss-like impress of metallic dendrites; these occur in many parts near the seaboard, and we found them in Southern as well as in Northern Midian. The conspicuous hill is one of four mamelons thus disposed in bird's-eye-view; the dotted line shows the supposed direction of the lode in the Jibal el-Bayza, the collective name.<sup>5</sup>

After continual disappointment in the north, Burton and his team turn their attention to the exploration of Southern Midian, and this is fully described in the second volume of his work. It was here that Burton believed the most important gold mines lay—even if this discovery was made rather late. Towards the end of the second volume, Burton gives a resume of his exploration of Southern Midian. He is in no doubt that this is where the most important gold finds are to be made, and he even discovers the ruins of a classical Roman shrine in the middle of the desert. Burton contends that, while silver and other metals were mined in North Midian, gold was the common metal in the south:

If the characteristics of North Midian (Maydan Proper) are its argentiferous, and especially its cupriferous ores, South Midian worked chiefly gold and silver, both metals being mentioned by the mediaeval geographers of Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of Burton's eager certainty in passages such as this (and, as already noted) no significant gold finds were to be made by the expedition.

In many ways, it is the earlier work, *The Gold Mines of Midian* that is the more successful of the two books. While on the surface the narrative is usually academic and dry, there often seems to be an unconscious attempt to name and categorize everything that Burton sees--and this sometimes gives the account a strange and symbolic feel: almost as if a struggle between pre-history and modern man is somehow taking place through the medium of language. The idea is communicated of a stranger in a new and long-forgotten territory giving names, speculating, analyzing and categorizing in such a way that the force of Burton's own character begins to bring new order to the chaos and even to "civilize" the desert sands. Of course, the "naming of parts" was a well-known technique of colonialists for taming unknown lands and bringing them under the aegis of the colonial power.

Mary Louise Pratt has pointed out how the development of the Linnaean system

of scientific categorization changed the nature of travel writing forever. This was a classificatory system, developed by the Swede Carl Linnaeus in the middle of the eighteenth century, through which all the plants on Earth could be categorized according to the characteristics of their reproductive parts. "Parallel systems were also proposed for animals and minerals."<sup>7</sup> Linnaeus's taxonomy was simple in its application and gave even the amateur naturalist the possibility of making a real contribution to science as new specimens could easily be placed within the classificatory system. Pratt sees the development of these taxonomies, in tandem with imperialist expansion, as a kind of intellectual dominance that acted as a counterpart to the more overt political domination:

Travel and travel writing would never be the same again...Alongside the frontier figures of the seafarer, the conqueror, the captive, the diplomat, there began to appear everywhere the benign, decidedly literate figure of the "herborizer" . . . [W]hat is also told is a narrative of "anti-conquest", in which the naturalist naturalizes the bourgeois European's own global presence and authority. This naturalist's narrative was to continue to hold enormous ideological force throughout the nineteenth century, and remains very much with us today.<sup>8</sup>

Pratt describes this "naturalist's narrative" as a narrative of "anti-conquest". By "anti-conquest" she refers to "the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony."<sup>9</sup> Pratt's definition of the typical son of Empire, involved in the activities of the anti-conquest, seems to suggest such a figure as Burton on his Midian expedition: "The main protagonist of the anti-conquest is a figure I sometimes call the "seeing man", an admittedly unfriendly label for the European male subject of European landscape discourse—he whose imperial eyes passively look out and possess."<sup>10</sup>

This is an interesting hypothesis in the light of Said's view of Burton as an imperialist adventurer who, though a rebel in his own land, traveled in the East with the intention of establishing his own mastery and control there. Said's description of Burton chimes interestingly with Pratt's noted "anti-conquest":

Burton thought of himself both as a rebel against authority (hence his identification with the East as a place of freedom from Victorian moral authority) and as a potential agent of authority in the East.<sup>11</sup>

According to Said's assessment, then, Burton, though a rebel in his own country, was looking to play the role of imperial agent in the East and make a name for himself in the process. It is certainly true that Burton had found difficulties in "getting on" in England. His family, while of gentlemanly stock, hailed from Ireland, and this was enough to implant a sense of inferiority in any gentleman of the time.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Burton had spent his childhood on the continent, moving from country to country with his peripatetic parents and did not fit easily into the England of his early manhood. After enduring a period of personal hardship at Oxford (where he had been sent by his father, to study theology, with the idea that he would later enter the clergy,<sup>13</sup>) Burton had begged his father's permission to enter the Indian army as an officer, and it was only when this request had been granted and Burton found himself once again outside England, that the true genius of the man began to come into its own. Always, Burton was glad to escape the responsibilities of "civilized Europe" and set out on a new exploration—as is clearly shown by his preamble to his Midian journey.

At last! Once more it is my fate to escape the prison-life of civilized Europe and to refresh body and mind by studying Nature in her noblest and most admirable form—the Nude. Again I am to enjoy a glimpse of the "glorious Desert"; to inhale the sweet pure breath of translucent skies that show the red stars burning upon the very edge and verge of the horizon; and to strengthen myself by a short visit to the Wild Man and his old home.<sup>14</sup>

Like other travelers, Burton opposes "the prison-life of civilized Europe" to the sense of freedom associated with the desert.

When Burton reaches Cairo with his old friend Haji Wali in tow, a "great repose" falls upon his spirit when he sees how little things have changed since his earlier visit nearly twenty five years before:

I did not fail when returning to Cairo with my old friend, Haji Wali, to visit the place where we first met. This was the Wakalah Silahdar, so called from the 'armour bearer' of old Mohammed Ali Pasha, in the Jemeliyyeh or Greek



quarter. The sight of familiar objects revived me much. Hard by the little shop of my Shaykh, Mohammed el-Attar, or the druggist, had fallen to ruins—this was in the fitness of things. Outside the entrance door, hung with its heavy rusty chains, sat or squatted the same old bread-seller who had supplied me nearly a quarter of a century ago; and the red capped Shroff in the stifling rooms on the first floor to the north had apparently been gazing out of his window, smelling the air, ever since. Not an object was altered inside. The Patio, or hollow square, was still cumbered with huge bales of coffee, gums, and incense, whilst from the two rooms we had occupied, on the south and the east sides, issued the same grating and guttural accents of traders from Hazramaut and El-Hejaz.<sup>15</sup>

In its evocation of what Burton calls “the unchangeableness of the East”, this does seem to suggest that timeless “East” of “Orientalism”. However, it is in no way indicative of a foreign agent come to claim an ancient land for the imperialist power he represents. As is so often the case in Burton’s writings, what comes across here is a genuine and even humble appreciation of the good things that the East, and particularly Muslim societies, have to offer to the traveler from the West.

In the same way, Burton can also wax lyrical when it comes to a description of the characteristics of the Bedawi, or wild Arab nomad:

The Bedawi, who becomes fawning and abject when corrupted by contact with the town Arab, is still a gentleman in his native wilds. Easy and quiet, courteous and mild mannered, he expects you to respect him, and upon that condition he respects you—still without a shade of obsequiousness or servility.<sup>16</sup>

Later, when describing his collection of botanical specimens, Burton is once again eager to heap great praise on the Bedawi.

The Bedawin lent willing aid, and gave me the names and the peculiarities of every plant, rarely saying, ‘I don’t know it.’ Their excellent memories enabled them to remember every item that we gathered; and they took the kindly interest of the Eastern man in adding to my store. This unaffected and childlike display of benevolence in small things, be it genuine or affected, is, perhaps, the great charm of Oriental life and travel; and it explains the fact that many an ancient maiden has regarded with peculiar complacency her berry-brown drago-man and his very big bags.<sup>17</sup>

This is far from implying any kind of simplistic interest on Burton's part in becoming a Lord and Master in the simple communities of the East due to his exclusion from the centers of power in England. Rather, it may be said that Burton appears to have imaginative sympathy for the Bedawin and simple Muslim in passages such as these. At the same time, that reference to the "childlike display of benevolence" indicates a clear understanding of their power relationship—and repeats a regular imperialist trope.

Burton, after all, did see himself as a source of knowledge and authority in the East: a knowledge and authority that was also always willingly at the disposal of the English center. This can be illustrated by looking at what Burton subsequently has to say about the Bedawin after his previous panegyrics:

Should we find it necessary to find regiments of these men, nothing would be easier. Pay them regularly, arm them well, work them hard, and treat them with even-handed justice—there is nothing else to do. I presume that this was the Roman system of garrisoning the forts and outposts to the east and the south of Syria.<sup>18</sup>

Burton's "We" clearly refers to himself and his English comrades engaged in various colonial enterprises across the Arab world. In other words, Burton's appreciation of the Bedawin and ordinary Muslims' fine qualities in no way leads him to lose sight of his own allegiance to and involvement in the English colonial enterprise. And as the reference to the "Roman system" suggests, Burton clearly saw himself as an agent for the English Empire in the East. Burton could also be more powerful and influential in the East as an individual due to his representation of his country's interests there. In other words, Burton's personal ambitions and his ambitions for his country in the East were twin tributaries running into the same river of ambition. Burton's intellectual "relativism" enabled him to appreciate the good qualities of other peoples while not for a moment departing from his essential view that the white European was by far the best and most "civilized" of races. In this context, it is also worth noting that the Burton of *Midian* is not entirely the same Burton as the Burton of the *Pilgrimage* and *First Footsteps*. By this time, he was far more integrated into British society, being both married into an aristocratic family (albeit a minor one) and in the employ of Britain's consular service.

In *The Gold Mines of Midian*, there is a definite sense that by minutely describing the barren landscape around him, Burton is also involved in a kind of civilizing practice: a bringing of civilization to a lifeless area. The knowledge of antiquity, forgotten for hundreds, even thousands, of years is returned to the barren desert sands by Burton's all-knowing voice speaking out, an omniscient logos in the desert wilderness. To give a taste of this we can look at some of Burton's observations on the surrounding land during his party's journey from El-Muwaylah to Wady Aynunah:

I must describe these blocks of porphyry, granite and syenite with some detail. They have been carelessly laid down in the *Hydrographic Charts*, which, contented with determining the coast line, often ignore correctness in the inner features, upon which the sailor sighting the shore is often forced to depend. The apparent wall is cut by broad Wadies, all of which, like the same features in Mount Sinai, are "Elath" or "Eloth," bearers of terebinths and palms (Elim) wherever water is superficial or lies near the surface; and we presently discovered that every greater Fiumara has its ruined settlement or settlements, each possibly, in days of yore, ruled by its own chiefs.<sup>19</sup>

Here Burton displays his knowledge of geography and cartography. He exposes a flaw in the hydrographic charts created and used by the navy. He further adds to the store of knowledge useful for the West by drawing attention to signs of accessible water. He continues:

Beginning from the south is Mount Mowilah high peak, 9000. This splendid block, rising sudden and sharp from the flat sea board, and invading the sky with its four giant arms, looks from afar more like a magnified iceberg than a thing of earth: the people call it Jebel el-Sharr, the director or land mark, because it is first seen by the seaman. It must be the "Hippus Mons" of Ptolemy: no topographer or cartographer could leave so remarkable a feature unnamed.<sup>20</sup>

Burton here provides a verbal mapping of the physical features, notes another landmark for sailors and travelers, and then displays his classical learning.

Burton displays a different kind of learning in his account of the Midianites. He draws first on philology, and then demonstrates that he has done the appropriate scholarly reading: Ptolemy, Josephus, Strabo, etc.<sup>22</sup> Burton then provides a review

of Midian's history as portrayed in ancient Hebrew, medieval Arab, and classical writings.

“Midian” is quite ignored by the classical authors of Greece and Rome; although it frequently occurs in the sacred books of the Hebrews, and in the Talmud and Rabbinical writings, and finally reappears under the form ‘Madyan’ in the mediaeval Arab geographers, and in the language of the present possessors.<sup>23</sup>

The region, however, was not completely ignored by classical writers:

Although the classical writers never adopted the word Midian, they have left ample notices of the Midianite region, or, as they called it, Nabathaea and Nabataea. The first and not the least satisfactory, is Agatharkides of Cnidos (B.C. 130), whose description of the Erythrean Sea has been preserved by the Sicilian of whom Pliny said, *Primus apud graecos desiit nugare Diodorus*, and by Photius, the literary patriarch.<sup>24</sup>

Again, Burton displays his knowledge of classical investigations, which his own expedition now supplements.

Burton and his followers also constructed a map of Midian during the course of their expedition which appeared in the first 1879 edition of Burton's book. This, of course, was *de rigueur* for serious travelers of the time. Pratt points out how mapping and the naming of the unfamiliar with familiar words could be, in itself, a way of colonizing and claiming what had previously been unknown. After noting how “mapping exerted the power of naming”, Pratt observes:

Indeed, it was in naming that the religious and geographical projects came together, as emissaries claimed the world by baptizing landmarks and geographical formations with Euro-Christian names...Here the naming, the representing and the claiming are all one; the naming brings the reality of order into being.<sup>25</sup>

This same point of view is present in Matthew Edney's book, *Mapping an Empire*.<sup>26</sup> Edney is specifically concerned with the mapping of British India, but what he has to say is equally applicable to all imperialistic map-making exercises:

Imperialism and mapmaking intersect in the most basic manner. Both are fundamentally concerned with territory and knowledge...knowledge of the territory is determined by geographic representations and most especially by the map. Geography and empire are thus intimately and thoroughly interwoven.<sup>27</sup>

Burton's map-making can thus be directly related to the imperial project as a whole, though (complicating matters) map-making is also a natural activity of explorers everywhere.

As we have seen, Burton is determined to show off his intimate knowledge of the surrounding landscape and everything in and pertaining to it during his exploration of Midian, and, to this extent, he might easily be viewed as one of Pratt's empire builders (or Edney's mappers) seeing everything through his "imperial eyes". Insofar as this is the case we might be prepared to follow Said's reading of Burton as an agent of the West speaking with an imperialist authority and perspective that invests both himself and his country of origin with power and authority in the East. However, there is a contradictory strain also present in this work of Burton's and, sometimes, his continuous narration of facts, theories and ideas seem to create an almost symbolic or semiotic stratum beyond the veracities of the information imparted. It is almost as if the East gives something to Burton on a personal level that he needs but cannot find in his homeland: a sense of belonging somewhere out in an ancient land on the edge of danger, mixing with simple but honest and pious people. Sometimes this subterranean element appears in the kind of direct and laudatory form that we have already looked at in Burton's paean of praise to the Bedawin. On other occasions, however, it is more muted, expressing itself through a certain wistfulness and aesthetic appreciation in the prose, as in this description of the desert sky.

Returning to camp by another direction, where we found signs of a made-road, we enjoyed a pleasant evening talking over the prospects of the Grand Filon, and admiring the exquisite beauties of the sky, whose deep blue crystalline vault gained double distance purity and serenity. Never did the after-glow, the zodiacal light, though clearly visible every evening, appear so brilliant; changing from purple and indigo to gold and pink, and finally to a pale sea green. It was so distinctly defined that the apex of the pyramid seemed to touch the zenith.<sup>28</sup>

He continues:

A height of upwards a thousand feet had placed us above the grosser vapours of the shore. Seawards, the stars—glowing red sparks like distant ship-lamps or lighthouses— showed themselves upon the very line where air and water meet. Inland, the misty giants in panoply of polished steel towered above the huge curtain of the bulwark, enchanted sentinels guarding the mysterious regions of the East.<sup>29</sup>

Sometimes Burton's appreciation of the marvels of the East is more simple and straightforward, as in his description of his party's short stay at Makna, where there is a strong sense of Burton's personal investment in the place he is describing:

Decidedly the most enjoyable part of a delightful and eventful visit to old Midian was the short stay at Makna, and the glimpse of the Dahi, or true Desert, which it offered us. What a contrast with the horrors of the civilized city—'the clouds of dust by day, and glare of gas by night, and the noise of the streets, roaring like an angry beast!' How easy to understand the full force of the Bedawi expression, 'Praise be to Allah that once more we see the Nufud!' the soft clean sand of the wilderness, with its sweet fresh breezes and its perfumed flora, 'the Desert's spicy stores;' its glorious colouring and its grand simplicity that engender male and noble breeds of man and beast!<sup>30</sup>

Again, we have the trope of "the horrors of the civilized city" in contrast to the cleanness and sweetness of the "wilderness". Burton shared with other Victorian travelers this appreciation of "primitive" cultures and how they exposed limitations in the supposedly "civilized" way of life. One way in which Burton deals with this contradiction is to turn the desert into a "land of reverie":

The Desert, with its sudden and startling changes from utter desolation to exuberant vegetation, is pre-eminently the Land of Fancy, of Reverie; never ending, ever renewing itself in presence of the Indefinite and the Solitude, which are the characteristics of this open world. The least accident, the smallest shift of scenery, gives rise to the longest trains of thought, in which the past, the present, and the future seem to blend.<sup>31</sup>

Burton's meditation on the desert contrasts it favorably with both the "civilized city" and the tropical forest:

In the forested land of the tropics Nature masters man; his brain is confused with the multiplicity of objects; he feels himself as prisoner in a gorgeous jail...But in the Desert man masters Nature. It is the type of Liberty, which is Life, whilst the idea of Immensity, of Sublimity, of Infinity, is always present, always the first thought.<sup>32</sup>

What to make then of these strange and contradictory currents in Burton's psyche? On the one hand he is the relativist who, though he can appreciate the qualities of other peoples and places, is certain of the white man's--and in particular his own country's— superiority and right to rule. On the other hand, he is also an outcast alienated from his own society by birth and inclination, who relishes the simple veracities of the Bedawin and Muslim as opposed to the 'noise' and 'horrors' of the civilized city from which he comes and to which he is also always destined to return. Said resolves the dilemma in the following way:

In no writer on the Orient so much as in Burton do we feel that generalizations about the Oriental...are the result of knowledge acquired about the Orient by living there, actually seeing it firsthand, truly trying to see Oriental life from the viewpoint of a person immersed in it. Yet what is never far from the surface of Burton's prose is another sense it radiates, a sense of assertion and domination over all the complexities of Oriental life...For even in Burton's prose we are never directly given the Orient; everything about it is presented to us by way of Burton's knowledgeable... interventions, which remind us repeatedly how he had taken over the management of Oriental life for the purpose of his narrative. And it is this fact...that elevates Burton's consciousness to a position of supremacy over the Orient. In that position his individuality perforce encounters, and indeed merges with, the voice of Empire.<sup>33</sup>

For Said, then, Burton was an individual pursuing his own idiosyncratic agenda in the East, but at the same time a representative of Britain's imperial presence there. More profoundly, Said asserts that Burton was unable to transcend the agenda of the ideologically loaded body of knowledge that was known as "Orientalism" in the West. For Said, the whole Orientalist enterprise, from Napoleon's conquest of Egypt in 1798 onwards, was no more than an attempt to establish the West's control over large swathes of Africa and Asia. On this reading, Burton's deep knowledge of the East and sympathy for many of its practices was finally no more than part of the complex will-to-power exhibited by European

nations throughout the nineteenth century.

Of course Orientalism was, in part, intended to control the East by generating knowledge about it. However, Burton, in particular, possessed a real empathy with Eastern and, particularly, Muslim practices. He rarely, if ever, criticized Islam as a religion. Rather, even in later life, he was concerned with what the East could teach his fellow countrymen about morality and attitudes towards sex (though this latter concern also had a double edge). In his account of his journey to Midian, Burton nevertheless falls into “Orientalist” ways of seeing and identifies with imperialist agendas, but he also expresses a sense of being at home in this world in a way that he doesn’t feel in Europe.

The three-volume account of Burton’s search for gold in the Midian region of Arabia has none of the verve and human interest of his earlier works on Arabia. Even Haji Waly disappears after the introductory volume, and with him seems to go Burton’s last interest in making his books entertaining for the average reader of his time. Only at the end of the final volume, when Burton’s wife joins him in Cairo, does a personal story begin to shine through: and this mostly entails the frustrating events of the Burtons’ return to Trieste and civilization:

The next Sunday placed us on board the Austro-Hungarian Lloyd’s screw steamer *Austria* (Capitano Rossol). As usual, the commander and officers did all they could to make their voyagers comfortable; the company did the contrary. At this spring season, true, the migratory host of unfeathered bipeds crowd northwards; even as in autumn it accompanies the birds southwards. But when berths are full, passengers should be refused; and if the commercial director prefers dead to live goods, travellers should be duly warned. The accommodation would have been tolerable in a second-class or third-class English steamer, which charges fifteen shillings to a sovereign per diem; here; however; we were paying between 2 and 3.<sup>34</sup>

So concludes the unsatisfactory exploration of Midian. No significant deposits of gold were found there, and neither the Egyptian Khedive nor Burton were to finally be any richer for the exhaustive and detailed expedition.

In conclusion it may be noted that, although the *Midian* volumes represent some of Burton’s least successful writings, they do, nevertheless, present us with a Burton who is largely at one with the East and emotionally and intellectually



inspired by it. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Burton also enacts numerous well-known Orientalist traits of behavior during his exploration, exemplified by his obsession with scientific categorization, mapping and the naming and “discovery” of previously unknown regions.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER SEVEN

<sup>1</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Gold Mines of Midian* New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1995, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Land of Midian (Revisited)* Vol. I, London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1879, xxiv.

<sup>3</sup> *The Land of Midian* 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> *The Land of Midian* 50.

<sup>5</sup> *The Land of Midian* 52-53.

<sup>6</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Land of Midian (Revisited)*, Vol. II, (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1879) 241-242.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes Travel Writing and Transculturation* *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) 25.

<sup>8</sup> Pratt 27.

<sup>9</sup> Pratt 7.

<sup>10</sup> Pratt 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Orientalism* 194-195.

<sup>12</sup> Burton's father, Joseph Burton, came from the lesser ranks of the Anglo-Irish landowning class which was a common recruiting ground for the English officer class. In 1820, Joseph married Martha Baker who came from a prosperous Hertfordshire family. However, after a sudden decline in his military fortunes due to his support for Queen Caroline in her struggles with her husband, King George IV, Joseph left the army and, with his family, commenced a series of peripatetic wanderings in France and Italy which were to see the Burton children grow up abroad. Almost everything we know about Burton's early life comes from the first chapters of Isabel Burton's *Life*. See also “Notes on the Burton Genealogy, Collected at Different Times, by Isabel,” in the Burton Papers,

2667/26, Box 1, Wiltshire Record Office, Trowbridge, Wiltshire.

<sup>13</sup> *A Rage to Live* 15.

<sup>14</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 1.

<sup>15</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 60. It might be interesting to speculate to what extent travellers like Burton, who emphasised “the unchangeableness of the East”, contributed to the later view of the Orient as something primal and unchanging that constituted a real threat to the Occident. In popular culture, this sinister apotheosis of the East reached its culmination in the works of Sax Rohmer and his tales of Dr. Fu-Manchu. The “yellow peril” became the threat of the Orient personified.

<sup>16</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 154-155. Burton, in this appreciation of the Bedawi, seems to have taken on board the idea of the “noble savage” hook, line and sinker. Is it really likely that the Bedawi (or anyone else) “never tells a lie”?

<sup>17</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 282-283.

<sup>18</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 155.

<sup>19</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 127.

<sup>20</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 127-128.

<sup>21</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 177.

<sup>22</sup> See the first part of Robert Hampson’s *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Conrad’s Malay Fiction* (New York: Palgrave, 2000) for a detailed account of just how important a reading tradition was for travelers of the time.

<sup>23</sup> Hampson 178.

<sup>24</sup> Hampson 178-179.

<sup>25</sup> *Imperial Eyes* 33.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew H. Edney, *Mapping an Empire; The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765-1843* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> *Mapping an Empire* 1.

<sup>28</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 220.

<sup>29</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 220.

<sup>30</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 355-356.

<sup>31</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 357.

<sup>32</sup> *The Gold Mines of Midian* 357.

<sup>33</sup> *Orientalism* 196.

<sup>34</sup> *The Land of Midian (Revisited)* Vol. II, 257-258.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE “TERMINAL ESSAY” TO BURTON’S *ARABIAN NIGHTS*: TASTING THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Richard Francis Burton was clearly more than the imperialist exploiter of the East described by Edward Said in *Orientalism*. However, when we look beyond Burton’s intellectual and religious life and move on to the territory of his personal and emotional predilections, it must be admitted that Said’s perspective seems more just—though by no means sufficient, in itself, to justify his overall view of Burton as a man who through his knowledge of Orientalist practices was able to exploit the East for his colonial masters. Nevertheless, in the narrower context of his own emotional and sexual life, it is possible that Burton saw the East as a way out of the strait jacket of conventional Victorian society and its views on sexual propriety.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the perceived prudery of Victorian society hid many easy modes of access to sex and pornography. For example, throughout the nineteenth-century, London was filled with prostitutes and brothels that allowed Victorian gentlemen to move beyond the conventional restrictions of their “genteel” society.<sup>1</sup> The famous Victorian sex narrative, *My Secret Life* shows conclusively, in its detail, that sexual pleasure was by no means out of reach for the average unmarried (or married) Victorian gentleman<sup>2</sup> Therefore, Said’s view of Burton as a man in search of sexual adventures in the “Mysterious East” must, at least to some extent, be tempered by the clear and easy availability of sex in Victorian London. Why travel to the Middle East for something that was freely available in London despite the facade of Victorian respectability?

In the ensuing discussion, I will look at Burton’s often controversial views on sexuality as expressed in the “Terminal Essay” to his translation of the *Arabian Nights* and later relate these views to Said’s portrayal of the East as a place where

wayward and sexually frustrated Europeans might go or be sent for the purpose of gaining new and forbidden knowledge. I will suggest that at least some of the sexual adventures available to Victorian gentlemen in the East were—as earlier pointed out—also on offer in London itself. First, however, a few things should be said about the context of Burton's translation of the *Arabian Nights* which resulted in the writing of the revealing "Terminal Essay".

The various European translations of the *Arabian Nights* are based on a number of Arabic texts from Syria and India.<sup>3</sup> These diverse and rough texts are clearly based on earlier originals. In the Egyptian desert, just after the Second World War, a fragment of the frame story was found dating from the ninth century AD.<sup>4</sup> The Arab writer Al Mas'oodi who died in AD 956 refers to this book and reveals that it was known as *Alf Layla* (A Thousand Nights).<sup>5</sup> This original book is lost and, although the framework story of Shahrazad (Sheherezade) has remained largely unchanged, there is little agreement over the origin of the individual stories in the collection. In the Middle East the stories were kept alive by professional storytellers from Arabia, Egypt and Persia.

The first European version of the *Arabian Nights* appeared in 1704, translated from the Arabic into French by Antoine Galland.<sup>6</sup> This twelve volume work (*Le Mille e une nuits, contes arabes traduis in Francais*) contained stories not included in the Arabic texts. Moreover, these comprised some of the most famous tales such as "Aladdin" and "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves". Galland himself insisted that he had heard these tales from a Syrian in Aleppo, but no one can feel absolutely sure that Galland didn't invent them himself.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, the Frenchman should be viewed as the real popularizer of the tales in Europe.

The popularity of the *Arabian Nights* in French soon led to an English version in 1706, usually dubbed "the Grub Street" version and translated anonymously.<sup>8</sup> After Jonathan Scott's 1811 translation, the next significant work was that of Edward Lane who translated the tales between 1838 and 1840. This edition is well known for its anthropological notes and bowdlerization of sexual content.<sup>9</sup> John Payne published his more accurate and complete translation between 1882 and 1884. Although Payne tried to minimize the offense that would be given by the more licentious passages, he did at least attempt to contend with the sexual content

of the tales in a way that Lane had refused to do.<sup>10</sup> Between 1885 and 1888 Burton published his own translation of the *Arabian Nights* in which he was at pains to portray faithfully the sexual eroticism of the tales.<sup>11</sup>

This translation is reasonably accurate if somewhat archaic in its use of language. Nevertheless, in spite of its literal accuracy and popularity with a wide range of readers, Burton's translation has been heavily criticized by Robert Irwin in his well-known book *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*. Irwin outlines his criticism of Burton as follows:

Burton was a man of many prejudices and they were vigorous ones. He was a racist (in an age when racism was acquiring pseudo-scientific pretensions). "Niggers", Jews and Persians got rough treatment in the notes. He was also a misogynist with a particularly strong dislike for society women. He was anti-Christian and he considered Islam, for all the faults he believed it had, to be a better religion, because it was more rational and more useful as an instrument of social control. The indices to Burton's notes are extraordinary specimens of rostered bigotry: "Blackamoors preferred by debauched women...Blind notorious for insolence, etc. . . ."<sup>12</sup>

Irwin's criticisms of Burton may appear just, but one might question whether a preference for Islam falls into the same category as charges of racism and misogyny. He clearly has no emotional empathy for Burton as a crusader for scientific method on the front line of Victorian imperialist complacency. In particular, it is Burton's focus on the sexual content of the tales together with the discursive nature of his footnotes that seem most to rile Irwin. Thus, Irwin complains that "Sex and farting apart, Burton's footnotes are a parade of barmy erudition interspersed with snatches of autobiography",<sup>13</sup>

In spite of this clear lack of empathy with Burton, Irwin does do his best to see the good things in the translation. In particular, he praises Burton's editorial practice (as against Lane's selective procedures), his literary valuation of individual tales, and his scholarship in relation to the formation of the *Arabian Nights*:

Burton had provided a full edition of the tales, even to the point of including in the supplementary volumes variants of tales he had already translated. His judgement of the respective merits and failings of individual

tales was on the whole good, and he had a much saner view of the likely history of the formation of the corpus of the *Nights* than Lane had.<sup>14</sup>

Certainly, Burton's version of the *Arabian Nights* is still one of the most famous editions of the text in English. In spite of its gleeful and sometimes heavy-handed obsession with unusual sexual practices, Burton's edition is comprehensive and reasonably faithful to the original sources.

It is certainly interesting that, after his lengthy work of translation on the *Arabian Nights*, Burton thought it necessary to write a long terminal essay explaining the reasons both why the *Arabian Nights* included so much about sexuality and unusual forms of sex and also why he himself had seen fit to interpret this sexuality so clearly for his rather faint-hearted Victorian readers. His own argument as to *why* he had included so much sexual content in his translation, boils down to one of literary and historical respect for an original source. He argues that there is no reason to spare the feelings of his readers in this regard, when there is already so much material available on the market of a far more vivid and colorful character. Furthermore, Burton suggests (somewhat contradictorily) that his work might actually be useful in liberalizing and generally opening up the taboo subject of sex in his own society. Burton makes these points most clearly in his notes to "Those Who Attack Literary Free Speech or are Frightened at Scientific Sex Discussion", to be found in the last volume of *Supplemental Nights* to the *Book of the Thousand and One Nights*:

I resolved that, in case of the spiteful philanthropy and the rabid pornophobic suggestion of certain ornaments of the Home-Press being acted upon, to appear in Court with my version of the Nights in one hand and bearing in the other the Bible (especially the Old Testament, a free translation from an ancient Oriental work) and Shakespeare with Petronius Arbiter and Rabelais by way of support and reserve. The two former are printed by millions; they find their way into the hands of children, and they are the twin columns which support the scanty edifice of our universal home-reading...And if the Nights are to be bowdlerized for students, why not....mutilate Plato and Juvenal, the Romances of the Middle Ages, Boccaccio and Petrarch, and the Elizabethan dramatists one and all? What of the natural? How absurd to swallow such camels and to strain at my midge!<sup>15</sup>

This then is what we might call Burton's argument for literary and historical accuracy in his translation *for its own sake*. He makes the point that many books and writers considered 'classic' at the time of writing, included far more blatant reference to sex in all its multifarious forms than anything to be found in his own translation of the *Nights*. However, in the same notes, Burton puts forward a second argument concerning why a faithful rendering of the sexual content of the *Arabian Nights* is important. We might call this the argument for why a greater knowledge of sexual matters is desirable in the Britain of Burton's time, and how a proper and accurate rendition of the *Nights* might help that process:

The England of our day, would fain bring up both sexes, and keep all ages, in profound ignorance of sexual and intersexual relations; and all the consequences of that imbecility are peculiarly cruel and afflicting. How often do we hear women in Society lamenting that they have absolutely no knowledge of their own physiology; and at what heavy price must this fruit of the knowledge-tree be bought by the young first entering life. Shall we ever understand that ignorance is not innocence? ... Where then is the shame of teaching what it is shameful not to have learnt? But the ultra-delicacy, the squeamishness of an age which is by no means purer or more virtuous than its ruder predecessors, has ended in trenching upon the ridiculous.<sup>16</sup>

Here Burton rails against the British society of his time where sex was not a subject for polite conversation and in which young women often had only the sketchiest knowledge of their own anatomy. In these circumstances, suggests Burton, such books as his might be seen as a contribution to knowledge in an area where ignorance had previously prevailed.

In the "Terminal Essay" itself, Burton goes on to spend much time and effort on a description of unusual and generally reviled sexual practices present in the *Arabian Nights*. There is homosexuality, with its precedents in ancient Greece and other societies (which was also raising its profile in the Britain of Burton's own time<sup>17</sup>), but, more controversially and potentially damaging for Burton, there is also the topic of pederasty. The latter is a form of sexuality that has been fairly universally despised by all advanced civilizations, and Burton has his work cut out for him in his "Terminal Essay" to the *Arabian Nights* in trying to convince his reader that it is an appropriate topic for academic study. He attempts to give his

work an acceptable intellectual framework by rather dubiously suggesting that forms of sexual activity that are usually regarded as 'perverted' are common in a particular geographical zone encircling the world. Burton famously gave the name "Sotadic Zone", after the Greek poet, Sotades<sup>18</sup> to this hot and sexually diverse region.

Burton's account of the "Sotadic Zone" is as follows:

1. There exists what I shall call a 'Sotadic Zone,' bounded westwards by the northern shores of the Mediterranean (N. Lat. 43 degrees) and by the southern (N. Lat. 30 degrees). Thus the depth would be 780 to 800 miles including meridional France, the Iberian Peninsula, Italy and Greece, with the coast-regions of Africa from Morocco to Egypt.
2. Running eastward the Sotadic Zone narrows, embracing Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Chaldaea, Afghanistan, Sind, the Punjab and Kashmir.
3. In Indo-China the belt begins to broaden, enfolding China, Japan and Turkistan.
4. It then embraces the South Sea Islands and the New World where, at the time of its discovery, Sotadic love was, with some exceptions, an established racial institution.
5. Within the Sotadic Zone the Vice is popular and endemic, held at the worst to be a mere peccadillo, whilst the races to the North and South of the limits here defined practice it only sporadically amid the opprobrium of their fellows who, as a rule, are physically incapable of performing the operation and look upon it with the liveliest disgust.

Before entering into topographical details concerning pederasty, which I hold to be geographical and climactic, not racial, I must offer a few considerations of its cause and origin<sup>19</sup>

Thus Burton attempts to create a scientific framework for the study of pederasty in the hope that this will make his discussion more acceptable.

Burton next goes on to consider the past history of pederasty, laying particular emphasis on the Greeks and their enthusiasm for tutor-student relationships. Burton contends that this Greek enthusiasm for what he so often terms "The Vice" was passed on to the Romans, who in their turn diffused the practice throughout their



colonies. In North Africa, the practice was continued by the Moors who, according to Burton, “are notable sodomites.” Burton informs us that Muslims of saintly houses openly keep catamites without in any way compromising their religiosity in the eyes of their disciples.<sup>20</sup>

According to Burton, pederasty is common throughout North Africa and on all the cities of the South Mediterranean seaboard:

As in Marocco so the Vice prevails throughout the old regencies of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli and all the cities of the South Mediterranean seaboard, whilst it is unknown to the Nubians, the Berbers and the wilder tribes dwelling inland. Proceeding Eastward we reach Egypt, that classical region of all abominations which, marvelous to relate, flourished in closest contact with men leading the purest of lives, models of moderation and morality, of religion and virtue. Amongst the ancient Copts Le Vice was part and portion of the Ritual and was represented by two male partridges alternately copulating.<sup>21</sup>

As so often with Burton, small details (“two male partridges alternately copulating”) are here used to bolster a contentious argument. Burton continues to take us through the sexual history of his self-designated “Sotadic Zone” in the pages that follow. Syria and Palestine “borrowed from Egypt and exaggerated the worship of androgynic and hermaphroditic deities”<sup>22</sup> while “The Jews seem very successfully to have copied the abominations of their pagan neighbors.”<sup>23</sup> We are told that the Sotadic Zone and Le Vice “covers the whole of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia now occupied by the ‘unspeakable Turk,’ a race of born pederasts”,<sup>24</sup> and is well known to Persia, Afghanistan, Sind and Kashmir.<sup>25</sup> After India “the Sotadic Zone begins to broaden out, embracing all China, Turkistan and Japan. The Chinese...are the chosen people of debauchery, and their systematic bestiality with ducks, goats, and other animals is equaled only by their pederasty.”<sup>26</sup> In America, “we find that the Sotadic Zone contains the whole hemisphere from Behring’s Straits to Magellan’s.”<sup>27</sup> According to Burton, while pederasty was acceptable and frequent within the Sotadic Zone, countries outside its designated borders were certainly not untainted by “Le Vice”:

Outside the Sotadic Zone, I have said, Le Vice is sporadic, not endemic: yet the physical and moral effect of great cities where puberty, they say, is induced earlier than in country sites, has been the same in most lands, causing modesty to decay and pederasty to flourish. The Badawi Arab is wholly pure of Le Vice; yet San’a the capital of Al-Yaman and other centres of population have long been and still are thoroughly infected.<sup>28</sup>

After creating this intellectual, geographical and historical framework of the “Sotadic Zone” and narrating its sexual history, Burton finally gets back to the subject of pederasty in the *Arabian Nights*:

The pederasty of The Nights may briefly be distributed into three categories. The first is the funny form, as the unseemly practical joke of masterful Queen Budur (vol. iii. 300—306) and the not less hardy jest of the slave princess Zumurrud (vol. iv. 226). The second is the grimmest and most earnest phase of the perversion, for instance where Abu Nowas debauches the three youths (vol. v. 64—69); whilst in the third form it is wisely and learnedly discussed, to be severely blamed, by the Shaykhah or Reverend Woman (vol. v. 154).<sup>29</sup>

The “worst” of the three types of pederasty presented in the *Arabian Nights* is cited to be that of the poet Abu Nowas who, in Volume V, lures three handsome boys to his home, plies them with wine (which he also drinks extensively himself) and, in his befuddled state, falls to kissing and fondling them. At this point, Harun Al Rashid, Commander of the Faithful, calls to see Abu Nowas. At first, Harun Al Rashid threatens to have the poet executed, but soon he is laughing at his jests once again and all is forgiven.<sup>30</sup>

Summarized in this bald fashion it is clear just how contentious a theme is being manipulated here for comic effect. The general tone of the tale is very light-hearted, and one is never in any serious doubt that the poet will be forgiven. Furthermore, the three boys are indulgent towards Abu Nowas and are happy to let him do as he wishes.

Certainly, no one is here portrayed as a “victim”: unless it is Abu Nowas himself, victim of the King’s wrath. The whole story should perhaps be seen as an example of how, in a hierarchical society, the wishes of important individuals are of paramount importance rather than any abstract ideas and principles. Abu Nowas is a rich and important man, attending on the King every day, and the three boys

(in a male-dominated society) might be happy to spend time with him in order to obtain a higher profile at court. Of course, none of this is mentioned in the story itself, where all the main characters act only due to their wish to have fun and enjoyment. Even the forgiveness of the King is only given after the poet has made him laugh. In one sense then, we are still in that strange never-never land of the *Arabian Nights*, where people are invariably activated by the most simple of desires.

Is this story buried in the fifth volume of Burton's translation (and the other lighter references to pederasty), sufficient reason to write so extensively on pederasty and abnormal sex practices in the *Arabian Nights*? Isn't Burton actually throwing a spotlight onto sections of his work that may have produced hardly more than a cursory glance from most critics of the time, well used as they were to Platonic and Greek models of a similar nature?<sup>31</sup> Certainly, Burton's own descriptions and explanations in his "Terminal Essay" make for far cruder reading than anything in the story of Abu Nowas and the three boys.

With the brief description of pederasty in the *Arabian Nights* we have already looked at<sup>32</sup> Burton's long and controversial examination of pederasty ends. The rather perfunctory nature of these few lines hardly seem to account for the earlier fervor with which Burton justified his detailed description of homosexual practices and pederasty in the *Arabian Nights*—and even seemed to show himself in the robes of some contemporary sexual moralist, determined to teach his timid and recalcitrant society the truths about sex. As the majority of Burton's references to sex in the "Terminal Essay" deal with pederasty and its history (as depicted in terms of Burton's own "Sotadic Zone"), it would be difficult to see what sheltered and inexperienced British maidens were supposed to learn from Burton of a sexually practical and useful nature. The effort seems to finally peter out, as Burton makes a politic dash for the moral high ground--after spending around a hundred pages minutely describing the history of a sexual practice consistently held in abhorrence by the vast majority of mankind during all periods of history:

Those who have read through these ten volumes will agree with me that the proportion of offensive matter bears a very small ratio to the mass of

the work. In an age saturated with cant and hypocrisy, here and there a venal pen will mourn over the 'Pornography' of The Nights, dwell upon the "Ethics of Dirt" and the "Garbage of the Brothel"...This self-constituted Censor morum reads Aristophanes and Plato, Horace and Virgil, perhaps even Martial and Petronius, because 'veiled in the decent obscurity of a learned language'...but he is scandalized at stumbling blocks much less important in plain English. To be consistent he must begin by bowdlerizing not only the classics....but also Boccaccio and Chaucer, Shakespeare and Rabelais; Burton, Sterne, Swift, and a long list of works which are yearly reprinted and republished without a word of protest...It appears to me that when I show to such men, so 'respectable' and so impure, a landscape of magnificent prospects whose vistas are adorned with every charm of nature and art, they point their unclean noses at a little heap of muck here and there lying in a field corner.<sup>33</sup>

This is a fine panegyric on which to finish his anthropological essay, but does it really hold water, in the sense of accurately portraying what the essential motivations of the previous pages have been? Probably, the answer is negative. There can be no doubt that Burton felt the need to justify and protect himself from those who would only "point their unclean noses at a little heap of muck", but why does he assume the need to explicate so much about pederasty and sodomy in an essay which was ostensibly written merely to explain and justify his faithful translation of the several instances of these sexual practices in the *Arabian Nights*? Certainly, the pederasty contained within the *Arabian Nights* itself, might come as something of an anti-climax after Burton's long-winded justifications, and there is a suspicion that Burton was very much in his element when talking about sexual practices and, in particular, abnormal sexual practices.

The notes to his ten-volume translation of the *Arabian Nights* are frequently full of the most explicit sexual references. In his commentary on "King Shahryar and His Brother", for example, Burton goes into anthropological and ethnographical detail about the reasons why "debauched women" prefer "negroes". This is hardly necessary for a full understanding of the tale and the Queen's secret love for Saeed, "the blackamoor." Moreover, as one might suspect from the topic, unscientific opinion seems to be dressed up as fact in Burton's notes:

Debauched women prefer negroes on account of the size of their parts.

I measured one man in Somali-land who, when quiescent, numbered nearly six inches. This is a characteristic of the negro race and of African animals; e.g. the horse; whereas the pure Arab man and beast, is below the average of Europe.<sup>34</sup>

This gives an odd glimpse into Burton's researches and suggests another side to his extensive travels. Frantz Fanon in his influential book, *Black Skin White Masks*, comments on this widely held belief in the superior size of the black man's sexual organ--and comes to the conclusion that it is a mere fantasy designed to emphasize the bestiality of the colored race.<sup>35</sup>

In 1886, Burton had published his first translation of Sheikh Nefzawi's Arabic sex manual, *The Perfumed Garden*. Burton was later to make a fuller translation of this work, which Isabel Burton, controversially, destroyed. The first translation can give us a good idea of what Isabel probably disliked about the second. Charles Fowkes in his Introduction to the Park Street Press edition, touches on a point that goes a long way towards explaining Isabel Burton's decision to burn her husband's last work:

In many respects, Sheikh Nefzawi and Richard Burton are kindred spirits. Both were men of action: in addition to book learning there is clearly a great deal of first-hand experience in their descriptions of sexual behaviour.<sup>36</sup>

Is it fanciful to suppose that Isabel, in the second extended version of *The Perfumed Garden*, was unable to come to terms with Burton's encyclopedic sexual knowledge: a knowledge that he had most probably acquired during his travels in Sind, Arabia and Africa? Was this the reason that she destroyed the manuscript that a London publisher had already offered six thousand guineas for?<sup>37</sup> There is no way of ascertaining the truth of this matter for sure, but perhaps Isabel had already showed herself a loving and understanding wife by not making any public complaints about the former work. Sexual techniques with names such as "The stab with a lance", "The Archimedean screw", "Driving in the peg", and "Pounding the spot", leave little work to the imagination.

From these examples then, which fairly represent a fascination with all forms of sexual behavior in Burton's works, it might seem that Burton was sometimes more than a little disingenuous in his protestations of concern for literary fidelity

and his contributions to educational improvement in his 'Terminal Essay' to the *Arabian Nights*. But why should this be so?

In order to answer this question, we need to look carefully at the nature of "Orientalism" itself as a Western academic discipline designed to explain the world of the East for Occidental consumption. Said suggests that many Westerners of the nineteenth century sought to escape the narrow sexual conventions of their own societies in the exotic and erotic "mysteries" of the East. In relation to Islam, there was undoubtedly a prevalent opinion in the West that Mohammed was the creator of a false religion that believed in polygamy, harems, etc. While, on the one hand, this was religiously deplored by the upholders of the Christian faith, there was also---and perhaps inevitably given the tight strictures on sexual relations in Western societies of the time---a sense that in the East a man could be free and live out his sexual fantasies in a way that would be impossible in the West. Said is particularly illuminating on this theme in his comments on the French novelist, Gustave Flaubert:

In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frederic Moreau pine for what in their drab (or harried) bourgeois lives they do not have, and what they realize they want comes easily to their daydreams packed inside Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherberts, ointments, and so on. The repertoire is familiar, not so much because it reminds us of Flaubert's own voyages in and obsession with the Orient, but because, once again, the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedoms of licentious sex...the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest: Flaubert, Nerval, 'Dirty Dick Burton', and Lane are only the most notable.<sup>38</sup>

"Dirty Dick Burton" then, according to Said, was one of many Europeans who sought to find a glittering world of sexual opportunities in the East that were no longer available in the convention-ridden West. Perhaps this is one reason why Burton's appeals to literary integrity and educational urges to justify his explicitness on sex sometimes sound rather unconvincing in his writings (and particularly in the "Terminal Essay" to the *Arabian Nights*). As Said suggests,

Burton was one of a long line of Europeans who had embraced the East in a search for their own sexual nature. Is it surprising then that Burton's heavily sexual nature frequently and happily expressed itself in his writings on the East? But how to justify it to his more prudishly inclined compatriots? This was the question that Burton had to resolve: and he did so, with the help of some fairly large helpings of disingenuousness and dissembling.

Said makes the point that Islam—and Arabia in particular—had long been associated with a liberality of sexual opportunities. This was partly based on misconceptions about the nature of “harems”, “polygamy”, and other things. However, it was also to some extent associated with the founder of Al Islam, the prophet Mohammed himself. Mohammed had been surrounded by wives and daughters all his life, having produced only one son, Ibrahim, who died in his early years—much to Mohammed's own anguish.<sup>39</sup> As Said observes, Dante even placed Mohammed in the eighth of his nine circles of Hell:

Maometto—Mohammed—turns up in canto 28 of the *Inferno*. He is located in the eighth of the nine circles of Hell, in the ninth of the ten Bolgias of Malebolge, a circle of gloomy ditches surrounding Satan's stronghold in Hell. Thus before Dante reaches Mohammed, he passes through circles containing people whose sins are of a lesser order; the lustful, the avaricious, the gluttonous, the heretics, the wrathful, the suicidal, the blasphemous...Mohammed thus belongs to a rigid hierarchy of evils, in the category of what Dante calls *seminator di scandalo e di scisma*. Mohammed's punishment, which is also his eternal fate, is a peculiarly disgusting one: he is endlessly being cleft in two from his chin to his anus like, Dante says, a cask whose staves are ripped apart.<sup>40</sup>

Said is obviously correct in his linkage of a long line of nineteenth-century European travelers with a search for sexual opportunity in the uninhibited East. At the same time, Islamic society is actually extremely structured in familial terms and careful about relations between the sexes. Nevertheless, ideas about “harems”, and “polygamy”, prevailed. Furthermore, the East had been subjugated to the will of the superior west, so a white conqueror could, in the opinion of many of the European travelers of the time, twist the flexible reality of the East to whatever particular fantasy he had. According to Said, this connection between the East and sex--and general sensuality--is still prominent in Western perceptions about Arabs

today.<sup>41</sup>

According to Said, then, for the European, Arab society exists only to be "ravished" by the Orientalist. Perhaps this idea takes us somewhere close to the perception that Burton and other nineteenth-century travelers in the East possessed about their adventures in the Orient. The Orient was a place of fantasy and dreams that could easily be twisted into whatever reality the white man wanted. The traveler, frustrated and possibly short of sex in his own convention-bound, but more "civilized" and "superior" society, might journey to the East in order to realize his sexual nature by "ravishing" it. However, nothing in this subjugated world was to be taken too seriously and after realizing his own nature in these exotic surroundings, the scholar and Orientalist (if such he should be), could return to his country and pour out his Orientalist learning and insights for the benefit of his own peers and compatriots. A disturbing void in the traveler's personal development had been filled and now, from a new Olympian height, he could better see and understand the kind of problems that his countrymen from similar backgrounds to himself had needed to overcome in their early trials. Following this line of reasoning, we could view Burton as a kind of inveterate rebel who always needed to find out new things for himself and in his own way, but was always and essentially concerned to return to Britain in order to pour out his esoteric and sexual knowledge for the benefits of his countrymen. In other words, Burton's Orientalism was essentially a way of coming to understand himself and his own place in British society better than he had before. In order to reach a higher level of self-understanding, the East needed to be "ravished" by Burton: its exotic and esoteric knowledge to be yielded up and disseminated for the benefit of the "civilized" world. In fact this is very near to Said's interpretation of Burton.

According to this view, then, Burton is a rebel who, unable to find the knowledge that he needed at home, journeyed out both physically and metaphorically to the East in order to "ravish" it of its secrets and bring them back home for the edification of himself, Britain and Britons. He had discovered the truths of the East and now, on his return, was happy to communicate them to the compatriots he had earlier left behind in the search for esoteric knowledge. However, not all his compatriots wished to read of Burton's successes in



“ravishing” the East, and he needed to present his material carefully and in accordance with accepted scholarly procedures in order to have any chance of seeing the old recalcitrant Britain learn from the strange and unusual knowledge he was now in a position to impart. Arguments about the propriety of discussing certain sexual matters in the ‘Terminal Essay’ to the *Arabian Nights* should perhaps, be viewed in this overall context.

Nevertheless, it should be well noted that while Said seems to accurately describe some important truths about the sexuality of European adventurers and their erotic deeds in the East, this is no more than a garish side show to his more important points about Orientalism, its general European significance and Burton’s overall relationship to it. In other words, Burton may well have journeyed to the East with the secondary intention of enlarging upon his opportunities for sexual experiences at home (though there is no actual proof of this), but this does not mean that Said is in the right concerning his more central contention that Burton was a *mere* Orientalist serving his colonial masters in England. It is also worth bearing in mind that Burton’s translation of the *Arabian Nights* was eventually very successful and, in consequence, his “Terminal Essay” may have been read more widely than any of his travel writings. To this extent, it might be suggested that Said in *Orientalism* has created a Burton—sexually promiscuous and imperialistic—that would already have partly existed in the minds of many of his readers.

In conclusion, it is worth going back to a point made earlier in this discussion. It is possible to exaggerate the unavailability of sexual intercourse for Victorian gentlemen of the period. As works such as *My Secret Life* and *City of Dreadful Delight*<sup>42</sup> clearly demonstrate, Victorian London was full of sexual opportunities for the middle-class gentleman—even if a certain kind of personality might feel less guilt about satisfying such urges abroad in “uncivilized” places rather than in bustling London itself. Furthermore, in the East, dangers of scandal would have been greatly reduced. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to point out the fact that Said, in his view of Burton as “ravisher” of the East, underestimates the common ways in which a gentleman of the time might have satisfied his sexual urges without ever leaving London.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER EIGHT

Judith R. Walkowitz writes that most Victorian prostitutes never resided in formal brothels. In spite of this, and even after a significant decline in numbers, there were still 410 brothels in London in 1857. See, Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 24. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman has pointed out the way that Victorian London was segregated into well-known districts: Covent Garden was a common place to pick up a prostitute. Even one side of Regent Street was unofficially ceded to the prostitutes: "Prostitutes mingled discreetly with the bourgeoisie and were informally ceded one side of Regent Street on which to ply their trade." See, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman, *Unauthorized Pleasures: Accounts of Victorian Erotic Experience* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) 53. Rosenman also indicates that while Covent Garden was for prostitutes, London's pornographic pleasures were to be found in Holywell Street. (*Unauthorized Pleasures: Accounts of Victorian Erotic Experience* 53)

2 *My Secret Life* by "Walter" was published in Amsterdam in 1888 for private circulation only. This narrative gives the details of a bourgeois gentleman's sexual adventures over a period of decades. It makes quite clear that a gentleman need never have gone without sex in Victorian London. It includes details of all kinds of sex and matters relating to it: sex from behind, face-to-face, three in a bed, details of male and female masturbation, primitive condoms, brothels, street prostitutes, and sexual disease. (See, *My Secret Life*, "Walter", Privately printed in 11 Volumes, Amsterdam, 1888). It has been suggested that "Walter" may have been a pseudonym for Henry Spencer Ashbee, a scholar, bibliographer and collector of pornography. However, James R. Kincaid in his introduction to a modern edition of *My Secret Life* expresses doubts about this: "But who is Walter?...There is an intriguing possibility floated by some experts, that the author was one Henry Spencer Ashbee, a fascinating scholar, bibliographer, collector, and tweaker of the righteous. It is my guess that Ashbee knew more about printed erotica than any man who ever lived: he published a remarkable three-volume listing . . . of nineteenth-century arousing material called *Bibliography of Prohibited Books*, and he possessed a good deal of erotica himself . . . But there really is no evidence to confirm his authorship outside of Ashbee's undeniable devilishness, knowledge, and interest in the subject; all areas in which he was extraordinarily proficient but hardly alone." See Anonymous (author), James R. Kincaid, Introduction, *My Secret Life* (New York: Signet Classics, 1996) 8. *My*

*Secret Life*, makes quite clear how easy it was for a Victorian gentleman to enjoy virtually every form of sex in Victorian London.

<sup>3</sup> The four original Arabic texts are Calcutta I, 1814/1818 2 vols.; Bulaq (or Cairo ed.), 1835 2 vols. Calcutta II, 1839/42 4 vols.; Breslau, 1825-38, 12 vols. Robert Irwin points out that none of these Arabic editions are definitive. See Robert Irwin, *The Arabian Nights: A Companion* (London: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004) 21.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin 50-51.

<sup>5</sup> Irwin 49.

<sup>6</sup> Irwin points out the enormous influence of Galland in discovering, popularizing, and translating the *Nights*. Even the canonical stories were shaped by Galland's preferences.

<sup>7</sup> Irwin 17.

<sup>8</sup> Irwin 22. Irwin refers to opportunistic Grub Street "hacks".

<sup>9</sup> Irwin 24- 25.

<sup>10</sup> Irwin 27. Payne was a friend of Foster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot and H.S Ashbee, two early collectors (and experts on) pornography. In spite of this, his translation of the *Nights* was fairly conservative in its portrayal of sexual content (though far more explicit than Lane's earlier version).

<sup>11</sup> Irwin 33-34.

<sup>12</sup> Irwin, 33.

<sup>13</sup> Irwin 34.

<sup>14</sup> Irwin 36.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Francis Burton, *The Supplemental Nights to the Thousand Nights and a Night*, Volume 6 (London: Burton Club For Private Subscribers Only, 1888) 437.

<sup>16</sup> *The Supplemental Nights to the Thousand Nights* 437-438.

<sup>17</sup> In 1897 Havelock Ellis had written the book *Sexual Inversion* with John Addington Symonds. This work celebrated same-sex love and saw no moral objection to love between a boy and a man. See Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 2: Sexual Inversion* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007) 26. "Jealousy is frequently aroused ... and even murder may be committed on account of a boy."

<sup>18</sup> "A native of Maroneia in Thrace ... flourished at Alexandria about B. C. 280. He wrote lascivious poems (called *tyKvaxes* or *Kivaitioi*) in the Ionic dialect . . . It would seem that Sotades carried his lascivious and abusive satire to the utmost lengths...According to Plutarch (Op. Mor. p. 11, a.) he made a vehement and gross attack on Ptolemy Philadelphus, on the occasion of his marriage with his sister Arsinoe, and the king threw him into prison, where he rotted for a long time. According to Athenaeus...the

poet attacked both Lysimachus and Ptolemy, and, having fled from Alexandria, he was overtaken at Caunus by Ptolemy's general Patroclus, who shut him up in a leaden chest and cast him into the sea." See William Smith, ed, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*, Volume 3 (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1867) 887.

<sup>19</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Sotadic Zone* (Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Fredonia Books, 2002), 42-43.

<sup>20</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 56.

<sup>21</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 57-58.

<sup>22</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 58.

<sup>23</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 63.

<sup>24</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 64.

<sup>25</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 66-67.

<sup>26</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 68.

<sup>27</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 70.

<sup>28</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 75.

<sup>29</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 80.

<sup>30</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night*, Volume 5, (London: Burton Club For Private Subscribers Only, 1886-1888) 66-67.

<sup>31</sup> See Plato's *Lysis*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*.

<sup>32</sup> See note "30".

<sup>33</sup> *The Sotadic Zone* 81-82.

<sup>34</sup> *The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night*, Vol. 1, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 170.

<sup>36</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Perfumed Garden* (New York: Park Street Press, 1992) 9.

<sup>37</sup> *The Perfumed Garden* 8.

<sup>38</sup> *Orientalism* 190.

<sup>39</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Pilgrimage to Makkah* 477-478.

<sup>40</sup> *Orientalism* 68-69.

<sup>41</sup> *Orientalism* 311-312.

<sup>42</sup> Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)

## CHAPTER NINE

### SEXUAL ANTHROPOLOGY: BURTON AND SAID'S “GENDERED AXIS”

In *Orientalism*, Said has much to say about the Orient and sex: the way in which the sexually restricted life and imagination of the European male was able to find fecundity and plenty in a far off place with a different culture and outlook on sexual matters. In particular, Said places the great French novelist Flaubert within this tradition and it is in the context of talking about Flaubert that Said's thesis about Europeans, sex, and the Orient is made most apparent. A journey from the stiff-laced and bourgeois Europe of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries represented for many middle class travelers an escape into a new unrestricted world of erotic sex and exotic places. Whether the Orient was really such a place is another question. Nevertheless, implicitly, Said suggests that the Orient could be molded into whatever the sovereign European race wanted it to be. In consequence, artists and writers like Flaubert, Nerval, Burton, Lane, Gide, and Maugham, could make journeys to the East in the hope of finding sexual adventures that were scarce at home— and in the process, shape the Orient in their own image. Thus, Said writes,

Woven through all of Flaubert's Oriental experiences, exciting or disappointing, is an almost uniform association between the Orient and sex. In making this association Flaubert was neither the first nor the most exaggerated instance of a remarkably persistent motif in Western attitudes to the Orient.<sup>1</sup>

According to Said, in spite of its supposed highly charged sexuality, the East was also seen as a place that was finally barren (like the desert sands themselves), and, while sexual enjoyment was a permanent staple at the Oriental table, begetting off-spring was another matter altogether. Once again, Said derives this point from

the life of Flaubert, quoting him directly in the context of his relationship with the Egyptian dancing girl, Kuchuk:

Where is the heart, the verve, the sap? Where to start from? Where to go? We're good at sucking, we play a lot of tongue games, we pet for hours: but the real thing! To ejaculate, beget the child!<sup>2</sup>

Said also suggests that those Europeans who found sex particularly difficult in their own society came to the East as a place where they could shed their inhibitions. He writes,

Just as the various colonial possessions...were useful as places to send wayward sons...so the Orient was a place where one could look for sexual experience unobtainable in Europe. Virtually no European writer who wrote on or traveled to the Orient in the period after 1800 exempted himself or herself from this quest.<sup>3</sup>

Said's "herself", which seems to come as an afterthought in the passage quoted above, is perhaps indicative of a blindness for the ways in which women contributed to the Orientalist discourse. According to Reina Lewis, Said in *Orientalism* consistently ignores the importance of gender in the construction of the Orientalist model, and in her book *Gendering Orientalism*<sup>4</sup> she suggests that women did have far more importance in the construction of Oriental models than Said is able to see in *Orientalism*:

For Said, in *Orientalism* at least, Orientalism is a homogenous discourse enunciated by a colonial subject that is unified, intentional and irredeemably male . . . in *Orientalism* gender occurs only as a metaphor for the Orientalized Other as 'feminine' or in a single reference to a woman writer (Gertrude Bell, in which he pays no attention to the possible effects of her gendered position on her texts).<sup>5</sup>

Lewis goes on to argue that Said's ignoring of women as active participants in the creation of an Orientalized reality is the result of a more general tendency by the West to minimize the importance of women in the construction of history:

This [Said's ungendered view of Orientalism] mirrors the traditional view

that women were not involved in colonial expansion (itself a subplot of a masculinist view of history in which women, if they appear at all, are strictly marginal)<sup>6</sup>

Lewis points out that women should not only be seen as passive victims of Orientalism, but also as contributors to the Orientalist position itself. She writes,

My focus here is on the role of white European women, as cultural agents within an analysis of the constitutive role of culture in the formation of imperial relations.<sup>7</sup>

Lewis sums up her position by declaring that attention to Said's "gendered axis" might successfully "deconstruct" what she refers to as his "monolithic analysis". She concludes that "it is clear that many women authors expended as much energy as their peers on creating the powerful narrative voice afforded by British colonialism."<sup>8</sup>

Bearing in mind Lewis' strictures on gender then, let us return to Said's points about Europe, sex and the Orient. First, the Orient, shaped as it was in the guise of European fantasy and domination, offered a place of unrestricted sexual activity to the bourgeois youth and gentry of the European world. However, it was particularly those Europeans who found sexual activity most difficult to obtain in their own countries who were more likely to come to the Orient in search of new erotic experiences. This "difficulty" might center on problems of class and difference (as perhaps in Burton's case), or on the moral and ethical complexities of the age which associated sex with a whole series of marital obligations. Thus, Said notes that

In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy...the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.<sup>9</sup>

Said suggests that of all sexual fantasists and predators in the Orient, "Dirty Dick" Burton was one of the worst. Certainly, Burton's situation seems to fall within the scope of Said's context of frustrated Europeans who, for one reason or another, were unable to satisfy their sexual appetites at home. However, trying to uncover Burton's sexual nature has very great difficulties. He was not primarily an

imaginative writer like Flaubert and most of his works are fairly dry, historical, anthropological, geographical and sociological in nature. Burton is careful not to give too much away about his personality and particularly about his sexuality. The problems are compounded by the strict Victorian morality of the time which permitted Burton to talk about such matters only under cover of learned works such as, most famously, his translation of the *Arabian Nights*.

It is true that in the class ridden Victorian society of his time, Burton was something of an outcast whose origins were on the lower fringes of respectability. His family spent most of Burton's youth traveling from European water-hole to water-hole (thanks to the money brought to the marriage by a rich wife)<sup>10</sup> and while this aided Burton in his phenomenal ability with languages, it also meant that he made few of the essential contacts necessary for an English gentleman during his childhood and schooling. When he eventually went to Oxford, as we have seen, he was mocked for his continental manners and survived for only a short time before begging his father to procure a commission for him in India.<sup>11</sup>

It is possible that this peripatetic upbringing made Burton uneasy with other English people of his class. It seems unlikely that he had sexual relations with any English woman other than his wife, Isabel Arundel. It is also worth adding that this latter marriage remained childless and, it seems, that for long periods in the marriage—especially as time wore on—the relationship seemed to be sustained more on a basis of friendship and mutual understanding than through sex.

Brodie in her biography of Burton, *The Devil Drives*, suggested that Burton was bi-sexual having both heterosexual and homosexual tendencies. His obsession with all things sexual is seen by Brodie as a substitute for the failure of his own sexuality in his marriage.

It was as if sheer quantity of facts about coital positions, permutations, aphrodisiacs and an infinitude of stories of love could somehow substitute for the act of loving or make up for the failure of sexuality in his own marriage. Married to a woman who could play skillfully at the role of wife, he came to accept her self-conscious and overpowering adoration as a substitute for sexuality. But he could not have been blind to the fundamental failure or to his own contribution to that failure—else he would not have fled so often from the marriage.<sup>12</sup>



In his recent book, *The Highly Civilized Man*, Dane Kennedy also has much to say on this theme. His eventual conclusion is that Burton had such an intense interest in the subject of sexuality that it could not be contained within conventional categories such as “heterosexual” and “homosexual”. He notes that there are: ... "indications, however, that Richard was attracted to men and may have had sexual relations with them." But he also reminds us that: “Much of the evidence is admittedly ambiguous and open to the danger of reading homosociality for homosexuality”. Finally, he suggests that

We might make better sense of our man if we acknowledge that Burton’s curiosity about sexual matters, like his curiosity about so many other aspects of human experience, simply could not be contained within a single channel of expression.<sup>13</sup>

This is an astute, if very general, interpretation. Certainly Burton was fascinated by human sexuality in all its forms as he was also fascinated, for example, by religion in all its forms. Brodie writes,

Burton’s capacity for loving intimately saw a turning outwards, and a scattering, finding its freest expression among exotic peoples...Hunger for the forbidden was with Burton always, and he indulged his appetite as a man just as he had when a child in gobbling up the forbidden sugar and cream, of Madame Fisterre.<sup>14</sup>

In this context it is worth considering Burton’s obsession with pornography, castration, female circumcision and sexual expression. Burton himself, the ardent supporter of Darwin and his theories, would always justify such emphases by reference to the needs of scientific enquiry. Kennedy is informative on Burton’s fascination with pornography:

Burton also had a personal appreciation for those publications that British law deemed pornographic. His close friend Monckton Milnes had collected what was reputed to be the largest library of pornography in Britain. . . . He was familiar as well with the formidable collection amassed by Henry Spencer Ashbee, author of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (1877).<sup>15</sup>

Brodie draws particular attention to

Burton's preoccupation with castration, whether in the form of mutilation, circumcision, or clitoral excision...He may have been exorcising an unconscious anxiety of his own by plunging into meticulous examination of the subject—just as he exorcised his fears of death by courting it—or he may simply have been indulging his sadistic impulses.<sup>16</sup>

Burton's obsession with taboo sexual matters has been perceived by most biographers as evidence of a great sexual appetite which is usually regarded as having been satisfied in his life. Speaking of Burton and Speke's dangerous safari through Central Africa, Rice writes,

And there were always the women. One gets the impression that for much of this period in Central Africa, at each stop, fever or no, Burton was passing his time in a village bedding a woman.<sup>17</sup>

Actually there is no firm evidence for Rice's speculations. If Burton was "bedding" lots of women, neither he nor Speke ever referred to the fact. Of course, in the moral climate of the day, that might not seem so unusual.

On the other hand, many of Burton's writings that dealt specifically with sexual subjects might also be seen as ways of satisfying an unfulfilled sexuality. The translations of the *Kama Sutra*, Sheikh Nefzawi's *Perfumed Garden*, *Catullus*, and to a lesser extent the *Arabian Nights*<sup>18</sup> seem to point to a powerful need to indulge in a certain form of voyeurism. The translation of intimate descriptions of numerous positions for having sex would presumably have the same kind of stimulation on the receptive translator's mind as the perusal of erotic pornography. Certainly Burton's translation of Nefzawi's work left little to the imagination:

When . . . you see a woman's lips tremble and redden, and her eyes become languishing and her sighs profound, know that she desires coition; then is the time to get between her thighs and penetrate her. If you have followed my advice you will both enjoy a delightful copulation which will leave a delicious memory.<sup>19</sup>

Rana Kabbani in her book *Imperial Fictions*<sup>20</sup> claims that one reason that the *Arabian Nights* became so popular in Britain in the nineteenth-century was because the women depicted therein were clearly subjugated to the male will: as were the

women in the Victorian society of the time. However, while European and Christian good taste forbade too lusty a fascination with the female body in England itself, no such stricture applied to Oriental women:

Burton's ideas about Eastern women never gained in depth even after he had spent decades in the East...The woman was chattel and sexual convenience; as such, she was necessary, but she could never attain the stature of true spouse. Although an anarchist in his superficial social behaviour, Burton always retained his age's polarised view of women. They were either sexual beings who were whorish, or caring companions in the home, untinged by sexual ardour. Burton's fascination with the *Arabian Nights* was greatly enhanced by the fact that they upheld his own views on women, race and class.<sup>21</sup>

Kabbani argues that women in the *Arabian Nights* fall into one of two categories: either they conform to negative stereotypes of women as demonesses, malign sorceresses, lewd prostitutes, etc., or they are asexual as pure virgins or religious wives and mothers. Kabbani connects this with Burton's own sexual obsessions and particularly with his fascination with erotica and pornography. In this context, she cites Burton's description of "Oriental" menstruation:

Orientalists are aware that the period of especial feminine devilry is between the first menstruation and twenty when, according to some, every girl is a possible murderess. So they wisely marry her and get rid of what is called the "lump of grief", the domestic calamity—a daughter.<sup>22</sup>

Kabbani argues that to view the East as a sexual domain was complimentary to the imperial world-view, reflecting both its racism and misogyny.<sup>23</sup> She continues:

Burton used the *Arabian Nights* to express himself, to articulate his sexual preoccupations. He made it serve as an occasion for documenting all manner of sexual deviation: "tribadism" was only one, congress with animals, sexual mutilation, castration, all these were given prolonged attention.<sup>24</sup>

After making these extremely unpalatable assertions about Burton's sexual nature, Kabbani concludes as follows:

While Burton was presenting his readers with accounts of sexual

mutilation practiced abroad, his medical compatriots were performing sexual mutilation...at home. Clitoridectomy and ovary-removal were two operations carried out with disturbing frequency in Victorian England . . . The medical profession supported the values of patriarchy, and sought to aid in the enforcement of the acceptable image of woman . . . an image for which Victorian women were forced to pay very dearly.<sup>25</sup>

Burton appended a Terminal Essay to his translation of the *Arabian Nights* in which he dealt with the sexual nature of his subject matter. In particular he traced the origins of pederasty to the beginnings of history itself and quoted many references to “Le Vice” amongst the classical authors. Most famously, Burton postulated in this essay the existence of a Sotadic Zone around the Earth’s center and equatorial belt where pederasty and sodomy were common. The name was derived from the Greek poet, Sotades, who dealt with homosexual themes<sup>26</sup>. No one has really given much credence to Burton’s hypothesis—and it is even possible that Burton himself was not truly convinced.

Victorian sexologist Havelock Ellis refers to Burton’s ideas in his *Sexual Inversion*<sup>27</sup> and, while initially appearing to give some possible credence to Burton’s ideas, he concludes his comments in a strongly doubtful way:

The theory of the Sotadic Zone fails to account for the custom among the Normans, Celts, Scythians, Bulgars, and Tartars, and, moreover, in various [parts] of these regions different views have prevailed at different periods. Burton was wholly unacquainted with the psychological investigations into sexual inversion which had, indeed, scarcely begun in his day.<sup>28</sup>

John Addington Symonds author of a history of the Italian renaissance as well as several writings on male love<sup>29</sup> was even more skeptical than Ellis:

The author endeavored to co-ordinate a large amount of miscellaneous matter and to frame a general theory regarding the origin and prevalence of homosexual passions. His erudition, however, is incomplete, and though he possesses a copious store of anthropological details, he is not at the proper point of view for discussing the topic philosophically.<sup>30</sup>

Symonds looks at the way in which Burton himself believed that French men in Algiers acquired the habit from locals, and concludes: “The phenomenon cannot

. . . be regarded as specifically geographical and climatic”.<sup>31</sup>

Dane Kennedy has suggested that Burton’s claims for a “Sotadic Zone” may have been due to a wish to give a pseudo-scientific framework to his speculations while also distancing himself and his readers from the distasteful subject of pederasty.

Why does Burton bother to make claims for a Sotadic Zone when his own examples of pederastic practices so manifestly contradict its existence? These claims seem to have served several purposes. First, by pointing to the climate as the cause of pederasty, Burton seeks to naturalize the phenomenon, removing it from the realm of religious and moral strictures. . . . To open the subject to scientific scrutiny, however, demands the ability to overcome moral taboos. Hence the second purpose of Burton’s claim for a Sotadic Zone: it allows his readers to maintain some psychic distance from pederasty by presenting it as an Oriental phenomenon.<sup>32</sup>

Kennedy insists that the Terminal Essay’s tone is set in its opening pages where Burton gives details of his involvement with the investigation of male prostitution while in India as a young man in the male bordellos of Karachi.

Burton reveals that as a young officer in India he had investigated the male brothels of Karachi at the behest of General Napier. This audacious announcement is followed by a brutally candid account of what he found there, including details about the range of services offered and their costs. In words that retain their power to shock, he remarks that boys brought higher prices than eunuchs because ‘the scrotum of the unmutated boy could be used as a kind of bridle for directing the movements of the animal.’ The studied ambiguity that Burton creates regarding his own involvement in these activities gives a daringly intimate, even confessional, quality to the essay.<sup>33</sup>

In his “Terminal Essay”, Burton also dwelt on the hypocrisy that existed about sexual matters in the England and United States of his day.

The mock virtue, the most immodest modesty of England and of the United States in the sixteenth century, pronounces the subject foul and fulsome: ‘Society’ sickens at all details; and hence it is said abroad that the English have the finest women in Europe and least know how to use them. Throughout the East such studies are aided by learned physiologists, by men of social standing and by religious dignitaries high in office.<sup>34</sup>

In his views on sexual education and the need for more sexual knowledge,

particularly on the part of women, Burton sets himself up as an early prototype of the modern sexologist. The Victorian woman, according to Burton, knows little about her own biology and he further insists that much of the frigidity and frustration in Victorian marriage is explained by the man's lack of knowledge about how to bring a woman to orgasm. It is certainly a little ironic that Burton should see himself as such a pioneer in this field when, as we have seen, there is some evidence to suggest that his own marriage was largely sterile. Kennedy observes that

His translation of the *Nights* was intended to provide male readers with the insights of the Orient into the physical woman, to inform them of the erotic responsibilities they were obliged to shoulder in their relations with the opposite sex, responsibilities that an overrefined civilization had sought to repress.<sup>35</sup>

Brodie, however, presents a more complex situation:

The intensity and almost frantic quality of his searching, especially on matters sexual, would seem to indicate that Burton through most of his life was seeking to resolve an unfulfilled sexuality. Moreover, one should not forget that he was fascinated also with all forms of heterosexuality—which most male homosexuals find utterly repugnant—and that an extraordinary amount of energy went into his 'field research' as well as into his translations on the subject.<sup>36</sup>

Having looked at the subject of sex in Burton's life in some detail, we now need to consider if Burton was indeed a young European fleeing from a place where he didn't feel any sense of belonging to a mystified Orient for the sake of adventure and sexual intimacy. Was he a part of that European tradition, most clearly exemplified by Flaubert, who sought to leave behind their own sexual barrenness by becoming larger than life in an exotic and erotic Orient that could be molded into whatever form the conquering European wanted? In answer to these questions, perhaps Said's own words on Flaubert's eventual failure to resolve his inner conflicts in an Oriental environment might be apposite:

The Orient threw him back on his own human and technical resources. It did not respond . . . to his presence. Standing before its ongoing life Flaubert,

like Lane before him felt his detached powerlessness, perhaps also his self-induced unwillingness, to enter and become part of what he saw.<sup>37</sup>

It is easier to trace many of Flaubert's obsessions than is the case with Richard Burton who, in many ways, was a very private Victorian citizen and scholar. Burton had no great wish to exorcise his inner demons by the writing of imaginative prose that would present his inner conflicts for future generations. However, it is clear that many of the obsessions that Flaubert struggled with were also important in Burton's life. Excluded from the genteel bourgeois life of the England of his time, both by temperament and circumstance, he sought to construct a new identity in the Orient. This certainly included—perhaps even as a prime motive—the throwing off of the sexual and social inhibitions that had dogged his early life. In many ways, it is clear that what he found in the Orient was more to his taste than what was on offer to him in his own country. However, Burton did not merely shape a malleable Orient to his own vision and imagination: he actually learnt from his Oriental experiences. Otherwise, we might say that Burton in this respect fits the general mold of European traveler that Said refers to in *Orientalism*.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER NINE

<sup>1</sup> *Orientalism* 188.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalism* 188.

<sup>3</sup> *Orientalism* 190.

<sup>4</sup> Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* 22.

<sup>8</sup> *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* 22.

<sup>9</sup> *Orientalism* 190.

<sup>10</sup> *The Tangled Web* 1.

- <sup>11</sup> *A Rage to Live* 25.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Devil Drives* 334.
- <sup>13</sup> Kennedy 214-215.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Devil Drives* 338.
- <sup>15</sup> Kennedy, 208-209.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Devil Drives* 336.
- <sup>17</sup> Rice 382.
- <sup>18</sup> See bibliography for details.
- <sup>19</sup> Richard F. Burton, *The Perfumed Garden of the Cheikh Nefzaoui* (Printed by the Kama Shastra Society of London and Benares for private subscribers only, 1886).
- <sup>20</sup> Rana Kabbani, *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* (London: Saqi, 2008).
- <sup>21</sup> *Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient* 85-86.
- <sup>22</sup> Burton, *Nights* vol. I, 6.
- <sup>23</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 101.
- <sup>24</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 104.
- <sup>25</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 105.
- <sup>26</sup> See Chapter 4.
- <sup>27</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion, Studies in the Psychology of Sex* Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2007.
- <sup>28</sup> *Sexual Inversion* 1, 2, 57, 58.
- <sup>29</sup> See bibliography.
- <sup>30</sup> *Sotadic Zone* 94-96.
- <sup>31</sup> *Sotadic Zone* 95.
- <sup>32</sup> Kennedy 239.
- <sup>33</sup> Kennedy 238.
- <sup>34</sup> Burton, *Nights*, vol. X, 200
- <sup>35</sup> Kennedy 236-237.
- <sup>36</sup> *The Devil Drives* 336.
- <sup>37</sup> *Orientalism* 188.



## CHAPTER TEN

### BURTON'S PERSONAS: IMPERIALIST DISSIMULATION OR PARODY/HYBRIDITY?

It is, perhaps, the noun “disguise” that best sums up Richard Burton’s life and works. Most famously, he disguised himself as a Muslim from India, born to Afghan parents, in his celebrated *Pilgrimage* and took the same Muslim identity a few years later during his journey to Harar in West Africa—even if, finally, the disguise was discarded before he actually entered the forbidden city. But clearly, Burton’s penchant for disguise manifested itself in lots of other ways too. Where, in fact, did impersonation end and reality begin? Was Burton playing a role when he was ostensibly the Victorian English Gentleman? Was the wandering traveler the real Richard Burton? Did a real Richard Burton exist? Or was Burton a kind of consummate actor playing many different parts, but never revealing his true self?

Said seems to take the somewhat romantic view that Burton was a master of disguise, who could easily dissemble his true identity in the East due to his innate understanding of the rules that govern society and--by implication at least--his command of the body of knowledge known in the West as “Orientalism”. Said’s Burton was essentially an adventurer in the service of empire. However much Burton might have understood the Muslim world, all his real and essential loyalties lay with the imperial masters from his country of birth.

During his time in Damascus as Consul, Burton often used to dress in Arabic robes and pretend to be an Arab. However, at least one Arabic observer has gone on record as stating that the whole pantomime was rather amusing as, due to his accent, everyone knew that Burton couldn’t be a real Arab.<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible that Burton dressed as an Arab because that was how he always

felt most comfortable? Burton's biographer Edward Rice goes as far as to suggest that Burton was a secret Muslim practicing 'taqiya' for all his life after he left Sind -and that requests he made to his wife, Isabel, such as not to cremate his body after death, should be seen in this light. However, it is hardly necessary to take such an extreme view in order to believe that Burton used both his knowledge of disguise and of the Orient for what were, essentially, profoundly personal ends.

Kennedy has pointed out that Burton's famous disguise during the time of his Pilgrimage was not perhaps as successful as we might at first think. He also suggests that Burton's reasons for using a disguise at all, could have been more bound up with his concern for fame at home than any real need to trick the local populace.

His subterfuge was not in fact necessary to gain entry to Mecca... Why Burton chose instead to carry out his elaborate deception says something about the complex array of professional ambitions and social pressures that influenced his judgement.<sup>2</sup>

Kennedy concludes:

There was one further consideration that made any thought of undertaking the pilgrimage as a self-professed English convert to Islam impossible: it would invalidate his accomplishment and destroy his reputation in the eyes of the British public.<sup>3</sup>

If this alternative and less heroic view is accepted, Burton was hardly a master of disguise and of the codes according to which diverse societies operated. Rather, he was providing himself with a disguise primarily for home consumption. Perhaps it really wasn't too important, most of the time, if his disguise was also accepted by his fellow travelers on the path to pilgrimage or not. Certainly, we have some reason to doubt just how effective Burton's disguise was with the various types of Muslims that he met on his travels. Kennedy is again helpful on this point:

However well suited to his circumstances, Burton's disguise was by no means impenetrable... The most serious threat to his subterfuge... came from the Meccan youth Mohammed el-Basyuni... Early in the journey, Mohammed

discovered among Burton's belongings a sextant, a scientific instrument that he rightly regarded as signifying a secret identity and purpose.<sup>4</sup>

Kennedy goes on:

Did Burton's fellow pilgrims decline to act on the Meccan youth's accusation because they found it implausible or because they found it inconvenient?...If he was subsidizing their journey, what incentive did they have to see him exposed?<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the reasons for Burton's various disguises were most probably a mixture of the practical and the personal. Rana Kabbani makes the point that Oriental travelers such as Lane and Burton also had to think about the strict regimentation of Victorian society and understand that mixing with Orientals as equals, in their own guises, would very likely result in ostracism:

The disguise permitted its wearer to move from one racial category to another as if by magic. This move, with its accompanying implication of moving downward in human worth and in social acceptance, was stimulating as a game; in reality, however, it was reflective of the severe regimentation of Victorian society, where any serious divergence from the consecrated hierarchies would lead to complete ostracism.<sup>6</sup>

Kabbani goes on to suggest that by dressing in Arab clothes Western travelers were throwing off the inhibitions and conventions of the Victorian society to which they belonged, and that the active pleasure which this gave, goes a long way to explaining the enthusiasm with which Burton and others took on the guise of the Arab. However, as she goes on to point out, none of these disguised Victorians actually preferred the company of natives to that of their own compatriots:

However, no European ever wished to actually become Oriental in emulating Oriental speech, dress and habits. Nor would any European prefer the society of Orientals to that of Europeans unless, as in Lane and Burton's case, that society helped in furthering his goal of accumulating facts.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps this wish to throw off the inhibitions and conventions of Victorian society and enjoy, at least for a short time, the freedom of being Oriental, goes

some way towards explaining those occasions when Burton and Isabel, during their time in Damascus, diverted themselves by dressing in local clothes and practiced the deceit that Isabel was Burton's son. Kennedy suggests that there was an also an element of wishing to 'transgress' present when Burton and his wife dressed in this way:

Whether the British penchant for disguise and cross-dressing took public form in pantomimes and other theatrical performances or found private expression in dress, demeanor, or sexual preferences, it gave expression to what was viewed by conventional standards as transgressive behavior.<sup>8</sup>

In many ways, as Fawn Brodie suggests, Burton had a dual nature and this too was acted out in a symbolic way through his fascination with disguise:

At its most obvious the war waged between the man of action and the scholar, the swordsman-poet and the soldier, the bawdy brawler and libertine versus the tormented searcher for the secrets of sexual vitality.<sup>9</sup>

Brodie also draws attention to Burton's comparison of Disraeli and Byron, noting that both had "that exceeding sensitiveness, that womanly...softness of heart which finds safety in self-concealment from the coarse, hard, and cruel world that girds it."<sup>10</sup>

Were Burton's disguises then also connected to his own "feminine" side? Is it possible, furthermore, that disguise may also have been a refuge from a latent homosexuality in Burton himself? Brodie, like other interpreters, certainly believes that Burton did possess an element of repressed homosexuality in his nature. In any case, it would certainly seem that in spite of his academic obsession with sex, his own heterosexual sex life was conducted almost exclusively abroad with prostitutes, native women and passing strangers.

For Edward Rice the essential reason for why Burton felt so comfortable in Muslim dress was because he had become a secret convert to Islam. His frequent use of disguise in Sind was a realistic enactment of what lay within his heart. If he put on a disguise for the natives, he was no less in disguise when mixing with his fellow officers and other soldiers. A fundamental change had taken place within

his heart and only Burton was truly aware of what had happened.

He could pass himself off as a trader or a laborer, or, what particularly pleased him, as a dervish, for among the natives Burton was now acting out the role of a Muslim, not only externally but in inner belief, for sometime during this period he seems to have converted to Islam.<sup>11</sup>

Dane Kennedy is far less sure than Rice about any fundamental change in Burton's religious outlook which he sees as having been relativist and comparative in nature—though he does not deny Burton's deep respect for the tenets of Islam. However, Kennedy sees no connection between Burton's love of disguise and his religious beliefs, doubting if any long-lasting conversion ever took place. He writes:

Was it true? Had Burton converted to Islam? The answer has to be “no” if conversion is understood in terms of strict observance of prayer and other demonstrations of faith. If, on the other hand, it is understood as a way of life, a set of values that informs one's outlook on the world, then Burton may well have viewed himself as a Muslim—at least for a period of time.<sup>12</sup>

It is at least interesting to note that Kennedy is prepared to go along with Rice's idea to the extent of believing that Burton may—at least for a short time—have believed himself to be a Muslim. If this is true—as it may well be—then this deceit might reasonably be regarded as Burton's most fundamental and important disguise during his life.

At this stage in the discussion it might be useful to look at Burton and disguise from the point of view of “mimicry”. This term represents a concept that has acquired importance in post-colonial theory since Homi K. Bhabha's book, *The Location of Culture* was published in 1994<sup>13</sup>. In that work, Bhabha devotes an entire chapter to his concept of mimicry (and, indeed, the idea of mimicry is present throughout the whole book) which is seen as a subtle way in which colonial authority may be undermined. At the root of Bhabha's idea is the concept that when the colonized people copy their imperial masters an “ambivalence” is created because the copy can never be exactly like the original. It is: “Almost the same, but not quite” and “a problematic of colonial subjection.” It is problematic because

mimicry is never far from mockery--and mockery poses a threat to imperial dominance. In Bhabha's own words:

The ambivalence of colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry--a difference that is almost nothing but not quite--to menace--a difference that is almost total but not quite. And in that other scene of colonial power, where history turns to farce and presence to 'a part' can be seen the twin figures of narcissism and paranoia that repeat, furiously, uncontrollably.<sup>14</sup>

In *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, mimicry is summed up in the following way:

The mimicry of the post-colonial subject is therefore always potentially destabilizing to colonial discourse, and locates an area of considerable political and cultural uncertainty in the structure of imperial dominance.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to consider how all this relates to Richard Burton and his penchant for disguise. It would seem that the activity of Burton and other Victorians who dressed as Arabs turns the idea of mimicry inside out. Instead of being a colonial subject mimicking the imperial masters, Burton and the rest are members of the colonizing race pretending to be natives. Perhaps it might be said that this preoccupation with native dress on the part of English Orientalists was akin to "parody" rather than "mimicry". Parody, presumably, would not be menacing like mimicry, as the person disguised was already in a condition of superiority in relation to the watching native. Even if the disguise was penetrated, the Westerner's superiority still remained: and his wish to dress as a local was, no doubt, viewed only as a mere whimsey of the colonialist (though the superiority that goes along with parody might also include an element of surveillance). Rana Kabbani stresses how disguise was also an entertainment and a release for people used to the repression of Victorian society:

The disguise...came to serve as leisured play-acting for the wealthy. It appealed to a jaded Victorian imagination by making a journey East more exotic, and it seemed to allow the traveller a deeper access to a cloistered world which he assumed guarded its secrets closely. The more difficult the journey could be made to appear, the more exhilarating would become the

actual act of embarkation. Burton's journey to Mecca is a particularly good example of such a fascination with danger. One of his self-confessed reasons for embarking on the "pilgrimage" was the need to put his powers of disguise to the ultimate and most dangerous test.<sup>16</sup>

As we have already seen, it is quite possible that Burton's disguise was discovered during his Hajj, with his Muslim companions deciding to stay silent due to the ample financing a Westerner could bring to the completion of a difficult and long journey.

Kabbani also emphasizes the ways in which the ability to deceive his companions appealed to Burton: The disguised person enjoyed the effect that his going native had on his compatriots. Burton recounts how he was cursed by two colleagues in the Indian army (who had not recognized him) and called an "upstart nigger" for venturing too near.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that the dual benefits that Arabic dress gave for entertainment and espionage came to make it, in Rabbani's words: "the classic method through which the British related to the Arab world."<sup>18</sup> Leila Ahmed has suggested that this mode of disguised penetration perpetuates in its very lineaments the condition of enmity, aggression, and rivalry that subsisted between the West and Islam when that mode was first devised: by the West. Consequently, aggression and cultural rivalry are always latent in it.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps it might reasonably be suggested that Burton, far more than Lawrence, Doughty, or Thesiger actually became an Arab and a Muslim--possibly even in his own mind. However, it is also true that whenever the disguised Burton was able to obtain any information that he thought might aid Britain in its colonial enterprise, he immediately turned it over to the authorities. For example, during his trip to Makkah disguised as a Pathan, Burton heard news from a fellow-traveler of riots being planned to take place in India, and telegraphed the details back to Britain as soon as he was able to.<sup>20</sup>

Rana Kabbani concludes that by travelling to the East the inhibited Briton was able to locate another self.

The journey Eastward (and the desert journey in particular) provided an

alternative self for the English traveller to inhabit, one that he could put aside once it had provided him with the necessary distraction. A haven from the bourgeois parlour, it was a place where inhibitions and social obligations could be shed.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, although there is much of an enlightening nature in Kabbani's words and ideas which go far towards explaining the fascination of a Lawrence, a Doughty, or a Thesiger with the East, they do not, I think, entirely explain Burton's whole-hearted commitment to the Arabic and Muslim world. The kind of subtle identification with Easterners and, specifically, Muslims that Burton possessed seems to suggest a nature that viewed a deeper understanding of himself and the world around him as the primary goal of life. He possessed an almost inexhaustible curiosity for the world and everything that happened in it and the frequent use of disguise throughout his career is best seen as an embodiment and extension of this tendency to take every iota of experience from each new situation that he faced. We can see the reason why Said takes the line he does towards Burton in *Orientalism*, but in his eagerness to prove his theory that nothing good ever came out of Orientalism and that all those who shared in this biased body of knowledge were inevitably themselves also biased, he did a great disservice to the life and works of Richard Burton, who was far too complex and original a figure to be straight-jacketed within the confines of such a theory.

#### NOTES FOR CHAPTER TEN

- <sup>1</sup>. Salih, "Burton at Damascus," *The Bookman*, October 1891, p. 24.
- <sup>2</sup>. Kennedy 64-65.
- <sup>3</sup>. Kennedy 65.
- <sup>4</sup>. Kennedy 72-73.
- <sup>5</sup>. Kennedy 73.
- <sup>6</sup>. *Imperial Fictions* 144.
- <sup>7</sup>. *Imperial Fictions* 144.
- <sup>8</sup>. Kennedy 90-92.
- <sup>9</sup>. *The Devil Drives* 276.



- <sup>10.</sup> *The Devil Drives* 276.
- <sup>11.</sup> Rice 131.
- <sup>12.</sup> Kennedy 81-82.
- <sup>13.</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York, Routledge, 1994).
- <sup>14.</sup> *Location of Culture* 131.
- <sup>15.</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York, Routledge, 1998) 142.
- <sup>16.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 144-145.
- <sup>17.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 146.
- <sup>18.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 147.
- <sup>19.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 147.
- <sup>20.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 146-147
- <sup>21.</sup> *Imperial Fictions* 150.



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## INDEX

- Abdullah, 79  
 Abu Nowas, 138, 139  
 Aden, 67, 100  
 Afghan, 79, 161  
 Africa, 3, 4, 9, 21, 31, 42, 55, 62, 67,  
     92, 98, 100, 111, 112, 113, 114,  
     127, 136, 137, 141, 154, 161  
 Ahmed, Aijaz, 48, 61  
 Ahmed, Leila, 167  
 Al-Azhar, 49  
 Albanian, 83  
 al-Baqiya, 68, 70  
 Aleppo, 67, 132  
 Algiers, 137, 156  
 Ali Agha, 83  
 America, 56, 107, 137  
 American Civil War, 30  
 anthropologicals, 108, 109  
 Arab, 48, 56, 78, 82, 85, 86, 87, 89,  
     97, 106, 121, 122, 124, 132, 138,  
     141, 144, 161, 163, 167  
 Arabia, 39, 67, 74, 77, 80, 86, 92,  
     97, 99, 115, 117, 118, 128, 132,  
     141, 143, 173  
*Arabian Nights*, 5, 6, 11, 54, 55, 63,  
     131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 138,  
     139, 140, 142, 145, 147, 152,  
     154, 155, 156  
 Ashbee, Henry Spencer, 146, 147,  
     153  
 Asia, 48, 111, 127, 136, 137  
 Bartema, Lodovico, 67, 92  
 Bedawin, 117, 121, 122, 125, 127  
 Bell, Gertrude, 150  
 Bhabha, Homi K., 57, 64, 165, 166,  
     169  
 Bhakti, 7  
*Black Skin White Masks*, 141, 148  
 Blake, Charles Carter, 34  
 Bradlaugh, Charles, 31  
 Brahmin, 16, 17  
 Britain, 29, 33, 45, 52, 72, 80, 108,  
     115, 122, 127, 135, 144, 153,  
     154, 167  
 Broca, Paul, 34, 37, 107, 113  
 Brodie, Fawn M., 11, 14, 25, 53, 55,  
     63, 152, 153, 158, 164  
 Buddhism, 2, 7, 8  
 Burckhardt, Johann Ludwig, 67, 68,  
     69, 70, 71, 72, 86, 92  
 Burton, Isabel, 11, 14, 15, 25, 53,  
     54, 55, 56, 63, 64, 129, 141, 152,  
     162, 164  
 Burton, Sir Richard  
     Buddhism, 2, 7  
     Christianity, 3, 4, 5, 6, 51, 73, 78,  
         84, 112  
     disguise, 76, 161, 162, 163, 164,  
         165, 166, 167, 168  
     *First Footsteps in East Africa*, 97,  
         99, 101, 103, 106, 109, 111,  
         122  
     Hinduism, 2, 7, 73  
     Islam, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 21,  
         36, 51, 53, 55, 72, 74, 75, 76,  
         78, 80, 82, 83, 84, 86, 88, 89,  
         90, 91, 99, 100, 101, 102, 105,  
         165  
     *Kama Sutra*, 55, 154  
     *Kasidah, The*, x, 5, 6, 8, 9, 15, 16,  
         21  
     *Lake Regions of Central Africa*,  
         62  
     orientalism, xi, 13, 39, 50, 52, 56,  
         58, 98  
     post-colonialism, 14  
     sexuality, ix, 25, 88, 131, 134,  
         135, 145, 149, 152, 153, 154,  
         158  
     *Stone Talk*, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 26  
     Sufi, ix, 2, 25, 72, 90  
     *The Gold Mines of Midian*, 115

- The Jew, The Gypsy, and El Islam*, 9
- The Land of Midian***, 115, 116, 129
- Wanderings in West Africa*, 4, 9
- Cairo, 49, 81, 82, 83, 87, 120, 128, 147
- Cameron, Charles Duncan, 31
- Cannibal Club**, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 109
- Cartesianism, 18
- Catholic Church, 54
- Catullus*, 154
- Charnock, Richard Stephen, 33, 34
- China, 41, 136, 137
- Christianity, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 29, 49, 51, 73, 78, 84, 87, 88, 89, 91, 101, 108, 112
- City of Dreadful Delight*, 145, 148
- Clarke, Hyde, 35
- colonialism, xi, 13, 41, 43, 47, 64, 72, 90, 151
- Damascus, 13, 18, 58, 112, 161, 164, 168
- Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and its Discontents*, 45, 61
- Dante, Alighieri, 143
- Darwin, Charles, 17, 30, 35, 38, 52, 62, 107, 108, 109, 153
- desert, the, 87, 118, 120, 123, 125, 126, 132, 149, 167
- Devil Drives, The*, 25, 53, 55, 63, 152, 160, 168, 169
- Disraeli, Benjamin, 164
- Doughty, Charles, M., 167, 168
- East, 13, 40, 42, 43, 44, 47, 53, 58, 61, 64, 67, 68, 75, 82, 89, 94, 97, 98, 99, 101, 106, 111, 112, 113, 114, 119, 120, 121, 122, 125, 126, 127, 128, 130, 131, 142, 143, 144, 145, 149, 150, 155, 157, 161, 166, 167, 168
- Edinburgh Review*, 53, 63
- Edney, Matthew, 124, 125, 130
- Egypt, 41, 43, 45, 67, 75, 78, 81, 85, 92, 97, 115, 127, 132, 136, 137
- Ellis, Havelock, 147, 156, 160
- Empire, 25, 29, 36, 62, 72, 75, 76, 90, 98, 108, 119, 122, 127
- England, 17, 19, 20, 32, 34, 37, 53, 74, 75, 90, 102, 103, 111, 120, 122, 135, 145, 155, 156, 157, 159
- Ethnological Society, 30, 33, 35, 108
- Europe, xi, 2, 31, 42, 43, 45, 60, 75, 76, 87, 94, 111, 120, 128, 132, 141, 142, 149, 150, 151, 157, 160
- Fanon, Frantz, 141, 148
- Flaubert, Gustave, 142, 149, 150, 151, 152, 158, 159
- For Lust of Knowing: the Orientalists and their Enemies*, 46
- Foucault, 46, 47, 61, 64
- Fowkes, Charles, 141
- France, 74, 107, 129, 136
- Freud, Sigmund, 14
- Galland, Antoine, 132, 147
- Godsall, Jon, 1, 15, 26, 64
- Gold Mines of Midian, The***, 115, 116, 118, 123, 129, 130
- Goldziher, I., 49, 50
- Governing Pleasures. Pornography and Social Change in England*, 32, 37
- Gragh, Ahmed, 99
- Greeks, 136
- Gudabirsi, 110, 111
- Habib, Irfan, 48, 49, 62
- Haji, 5, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 69, 78, 83, 100, 104, 120, 128
- Haji Wali, 115
- Hajj, 68, 70, 72, 75, 83, 88, 91, 98, 100, 167
- Harar, 97, 98, 99, 100, 104, 105, 106, 111, 161
- Heath, Isidore, 34
- Hebrew, 18, 124
- Helms, Mary H., 42, 59
- Highly Civilized Man, The*, xi, 9, 15, 25, 32, 37, 51, 56, 62, 92, 153
- Hinayana, 7
- Hinduism, 2, 7, 73



- Hodgson, John, 31  
 homosexuality, 135, 153, 164  
 Hourani, Albert, 48, 60, 61  
 Hunt, James, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 37, 109, 114  
 Ibn Battuta, 41, 59  
 Ibn Juzayy, 41, 59  
*Imperial Eyes Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 14, 25, 41, 50, 115, 119, 129  
*Imperial Fictions Europe's Myths of Orient*, 25  
*Imperial Fictions: Europe's Myths of Orient*, 13  
 imperialism, 11, 14, 41, 42, 51, 52, 56, 72, 97  
 India, 8, 20, 41, 72, 74, 78, 79, 124, 130, 132, 137, 152, 157, 161, 167  
 Ireland, 103, 120  
 Irwin, Robert, 45, 46, 49, 54, 61, 63, 133, 147  
 Islam, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 21, 36, 39, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51, 53, 55, 57, 60, 64, 67, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 80, 82, 83, 84, 88, 89, 90, 91, 93, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 111, 112, 115, 128, 133, 142, 143, 162, 164, 165, 167  
*Ivory Towers on Sand*, 43, 60  
 Jassanoff, Maya, 46  
 Jebel el-Abyaz, 117  
 Jeddah, 105  
 Jesus, 34, 78, 84, 91  
 Jirads, 105  
 Josephus, 123  
 Judaism, 49, 73  
 Ka'aba, 67, 68, 79, 92  
 Kabbani, Rana, xi, 13, 14, 25, 26, 154, 155, 160, 163, 166, 167, 168  
 Karma, 7  
*Kasidah, The*, 21  
 Kennedy, Dane, xi, 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 12, 15, 25, 26, 32, 33, 37, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 62, 63, 64, 92, 109, 113, 114, 153, 157, 158, 160, 162, 163, 164, 165, 168, 169  
 Khayyam, Omar, 15, 22  
 Kramer, Martin, 43, 44, 45, 60, 61  
 Kuchuk, 150  
*Land of Midian Revisited, The*, 115  
 Lane, Edward, 132, 133, 134, 142, 147, 149, 159, 163  
 Lawrence, T.E., 57, 98, 167, 168  
 Lewis, Bernard, 42, 43, 45, 49, 59, 60  
 Lewis, Reina, 150, 151, 159  
 Linnaeus, Carl, 119  
*Location of Culture, The*, 64, 165, 169  
 Long Pig Club, 35  
 Lovell, Mary, 14, 15, 26, 55, 56, 64  
 Lutz, Deborah, 32, 33, 37  
 Madinah, 67, 78, 80, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 99, 111  
 Mahayana, 7  
 Makkah, 40, 67, 68, 74, 78, 79, 80, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 98, 99, 100, 111, 112, 148, 167  
*Mapping an Empire*, 124, 130  
 Maugham, Somerset, 149  
 Mecca, 11, 57, 75, 92, 98, 162, 167  
 Meredith, George, 33  
 Middle East, 43, 49, 56, 75, 132  
**Midian**, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 122, 124, 125, 126, 128, 129, 130  
 Milnes, Richard Monckton, 29, 30, 33, 153  
 mimicry, 165, 166  
 monogenists, 30  
 Moors, 137  
 Morton, Samuel George, 107, 113  
 mosque, 68, 70, 71, 101, 102, 103  
 Muezzin, 101  
 Muslim, 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 21, 39, 40, 48, 49, 56, 57, 64, 67, 68, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 87, 89, 90, 91, 97, 98, 99, 100, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 111, 121, 122, 127, 128, 161, 162, 164, 165, 167, 168

- My Secret Life*, 131, 145, 146  
 Nag's Head pub, 35  
 Napoleon, 41, 43, 60, 97, 127  
 National Socialists, 36  
 Nejd, 80  
 Nietzsche, 24  
 Nile, xi, 55, 81, 92  
 Nufud, 126  
*On the Phenomena of Hybridity in the Genus Homo*, 34, 37  
 Orient, xi, 41, 44, 48, 50, 57, 58, 75, 97, 98, 127, 130, 142, 144, 149, 150, 151, 158, 159, 160, 162  
 Orientalism, xi, 1, 12, 13, 26, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 93, 97, 98, 99, 101, 105, 106, 112, 121, 127, 128, 129, 130, 142, 144, 145, 148, 149, 150, 151, 159, 160, 161, 168  
*Origin of Species*, 17, 35, 38, 52, 62  
 Oxford, 13, 58, 77, 112, 113, 120, 152  
 Palestine, 62, 89, 137  
 Palestinian question, 44  
 Palgrave, Francis, 77, 93, 130  
 Payne, John, 54, 63, 132, 147  
*Perfumed Garden, The*, 141, 148, 154, 160  
*Personal Narrative of a Year's Journey through Central and Eastern Arabia*, 93  
 Photius, 124  
 Plaisted Wilde, Sir James, 31  
*Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*, 32, 37  
 polygenism, 16, 35, 107, 108  
 Polygott, Dr., 17  
 pornography, 12, 30, 31, 32, 33, 63, 131, 146, 147, 153, 154, 155  
*Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 166, 169  
 postcolonial theory, xi  
 post-colonialism, 44, 60, 64  
 Pratt, Mary Louise, xi, 13, 14, 25, 26, 41, 42, 50, 57, 59, 61, 62, 118, 119, 124, 125, 129  
 Prichard, James Cowles, 107, 113  
*Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom*, 9, 52, 108  
 Ptolemy, 123, 147  
 Queen Budur, 138  
 Question of Orientalism, The, 42, 59  
*Rage to Live*, A, 14, 26, 55, 56, 64, 130, 160  
 Rainy, William, 4, 9  
 Raja Yoga, 7  
 Rashid, Harun Al, 138  
 Renaissance, 43  
*Rhetoric of Empire, The*, 50  
 Rice, Edward, 1, 11, 12, 14, 25, 26, 55, 56, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, 93, 98, 154, 160, 162, 164, 165, 169  
*Rihla, The*, 41  
 Roman, 78, 118, 122, 148  
 Russell, Lord, 4  
 Said  
     *Orientalism*, 45, 59  
 Said, Edward  
     Gustave Flaubert, 142, 149, 150, 152  
     *Orientalism*, xi, 1, 12, 13, 39, 40, 41, 43, 44, 47, 50, 52, 56, 58, 97, 101, 131, 145, 149, 150, 159, 168  
     sexual fantasies, 142  
 Shahrazad, 132  
 Sigel, Lisa, 32, 33, 37  
 Sind, 2, 3, 6, 12, 20, 24, 56, 72, 77, 98, 111, 136, 137, 141, 162, 164  
 Somal, 102, 110  
 Somali, 100, 106, 109, 110, 141  
 Sotades, 147, 156  
*Sotadic Zone, The*, 136, 137, 138, 139, 148, 156, 157, 160  
 Speke, John, xi, 12, 55, 62, 67, 92, 154  
 Spurr, David, 50, 57, 62

- Stisted, Giorgia, 11, 25, 54  
 Stocking, George, 106, 107, 108, 109, 113, 114  
*Stone Talk*, 16, 63  
 Strabo, 123  
 Studholme, General, 31  
 Sufi, 2, 5, 6, 11, 25, 53, 56, 67, 72, 73, 78, 79, 80, 84, 90, 98, 111  
 Sufism, 2, 6, 7, 8, 20, 21, 24, 53, 72, 73  
 Swinburne, Algernon, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37  
 Symonds, John Addington, 147, 156  
 Syria, 45, 92, 122, 132, 137  
 taqiya, 76, 77, 78, 79, 84, 91, 162  
 "Terminal Essay", 5, 131, 132  
 Thesiger, Wilferd, 55, 167, 168  
*Tractatus*, 8  
 Turks, 69, 70, 71, 110  
*Two Trips to Gorilla Land*, 3, 9  
 Tylor, E.B., 4, 9, 52, 63, 107, 108  
*Ulysses' Sail: An Ethnographic Odyssey of Power, Knowledge, and Geographical Distance*, 42  
 United States, 157  
 Victoria, 25, 29  
 Victorian, xi, 1, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 29, 30, 32, 33, 37, 39, 52, 58, 67, 106, 107, 108, 110, 113, 114, 120, 126, 131, 132, 133, 134, 145, 146, 152, 155, 156, 158, 159, 161, 163, 166  
 Wahhabi, 80  
 Walter, 146  
 West, the, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 21, 47, 48, 51, 60, 64, 87, 89, 97, 100, 101, 104, 106, 121, 123, 125, 127, 142, 150, 161, 167  
 Western, 3, 6, 42, 43, 44, 45, 52, 57, 58, 97, 101, 105, 112, 142, 143, 149, 163  
*White Mythologies*, 42, 59  
 Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 8, 46, 61  
 Wright, Thomas, 11, 25, 54, 63  
 Young, Robert J.C., 42, 47, 57, 59, 61  
 Zayla, 100, 101, 102, 103



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